

# SIGHT AND SOUND

16

*The  
Film  
Quarterly*



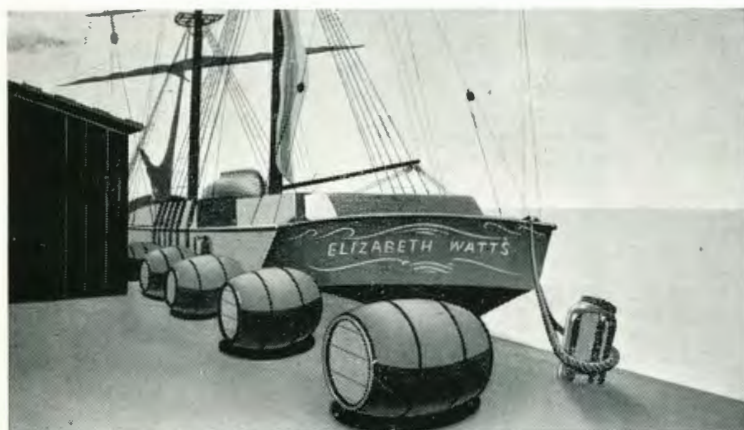
**SILENT FILM COMEDY** *by* **SIEGFRIED KRACAUER**  
**BETTE DAVIS** *by* **GAVIN LAMBERT**  
**JAMES JOYCE AND THE CINEMA**

**Richard Winnington    Philip Hope-Wallace**  
**Catherine de la Roche**



# Oil

## ON THE SCREEN



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# SIGHT AND SOUND

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DANIEL ANGEL PRODUCTIONS for *Another Man's Poison*.

COLIN LESSLIE PRODUCTIONS for *No Resting Place*.

J. ARTHUR RANK ORGANISATION for *White Corridors*.

UNITED ARTISTS for *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *The Sound of Fury*.

R.K.O.-RADIO for *Alice in Wonderland*.

METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER for pictures of Marge and Gower Champion and Richard Brooks.

WARNER BROS. for *Strangers on a Train*, *The Damned Don't Cry*, *Watch on the Rhine*, *Mr. Skeffington*, *In This Our Life*, *The Great Lie*, *Jezebel*, *Dark Victory*, *Now Voyager*, *Front Page Woman*, *All This and Heaven Too*, *Deception*, *June Bride*, *Beyond the Forest*, *Winter Meeting*.

20TH CENTURY-FOX for *All About Eve*, *Cry of the City*.

PARAMOUNT PICTURES for *The Dividing Line*, *Union Station*, *Double Indemnity*.

REPUBLIC PICTURES for *Macbeth*.

MEMNON FILMS for *Olivia*.

FILM TRADERS for *Four in a Jeep*.

ARCHWAY FILMS for *Cammino della Speranza*, *Riso Amaro*.

Richard Winnington's drawings of *Bette Davis* in *Watch on the Rhine*, *All About Eve* and *Winter Meeting* first appeared in the NEWS CHRONICLE, and we are grateful for permission to reproduce them.

"*Silent Film Comedy*" by Siegfried Kracauer (author of "*From Caligari to Hitler*") is drawn from a book on film aesthetics being prepared with the aid of a grant from the Bollingen Foundation, to be published by Oxford University Press.

## CORRESPONDENTS

U.S.A.: Harold Leonard,

ITALY: Robert Hawkins

FRANCE: Francis Koval

SCANDINAVIA: Fynn Syversen

ON THE COVER: *Bette Davis* in *Another Man's Poison* (see page 12)



# CORRESPONDENCE

## CAGNEY AND THE MOB

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND*

Sir,—While the development of the American gangster film, and the prominent part played in that development by James Cagney, are discussed in highly interesting fashion in the May issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, it seems that some curious omissions have been made. There must be many readers who share Mr. Ken Tynan's admiration for the consistently entertaining Cagney, but surely the contributions of Edward G. Robinson and George Raft to the same branch of screen crime deserve some acknowledgment as well.

Whatever opinions may be held of Cagney, Robinson and Raft where acting ability is concerned, all three exerted a considerable influence and were immensely popular in their particular field of villainy. All three seemed to move naturally in a world of bootlegging, hectic gunfights, jaded blondes and wise-cracking terrorism. All three must have become resigned during the 'thirties to a sticky but defiant ending in the last reel.

Robinson, indeed, was so successful a thug at the time that his efforts to break away from type, as in *This Man Reuter* and *Dr. Ehrlich's Magic Bullet*, were positively resented in some quarters. The confusion roused by the latter title among the film-going public, with those seeking another gangster epic coming away in disgust, and many people who enjoyed serious biography staying away altogether, was probably felt most at the box-office. One also remembers with pleasure the skilful Robinson variations of unlawful character, from the roughneck of *Bullets or Ballots* to the cultured *Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse*, and the splendid burlesque of *A Slight Case of Murder and Brother Orchid*. Mr. Tynan refers to him, presumably, when he says that Bogart "was usually featured with bigger stars and better directors than Warners could offer Cagney". General popularity has since raised Bogart himself to star ranking, but, if Huston's comparatively recent *Key Largo* is any criterion, Robinson was and still is a more impressive actor altogether.

George Raft seems to have been playing the reformed, refined or rueful hoodlum ever since his coin-flipping appearance in *Scarface*, but the popularity is still there, especially among women. Seeing the present-day carefully contrived fights between Raft and his adversaries, usually photographed in a murky warehouse or darkened room, one may think wistfully of his slogging marathon with Wallace Beery in *The Bowery*. However, the player's other accessories continue in service: the inevitable scene on a dance floor, the natty Broadway suitings, the baseball ground backchat, and the beautiful shady ladies.

And one would have liked more recognition of "the Mob" in Mr. Tynan's article. The supporting work of such actors as Edward Brophy, Marc Lawrence, Harold Huber, Lionel Stander and Douglas Fowley formed a vital part in the success of the gangster film. Their loyalties, treacheries, surface brutality and underlying eccentricity, provided an admirable background to the activities of the "number one guys".

What guys they were . . . and what a mob !

Yours faithfully,  
J. C. M. SARL.

107 Brookside, East Barnet, Herts.

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND*

Sir,—I was surprised and a little indignant to note that in your May issue article "Cagney and the Mob", no mention is made of Anatole Litvak's *City for Conquest*, in which Cagney gave one of the most affecting performances of his career in a sadly overlooked film.

Admittedly, in *City for Conquest*, James Cagney portrayed no mobster but a tough little prizefighter from the streets of Brooklyn whom the mobsters exploited and almost destroyed. This unpretentious story of three ambitious Brooklyn children and their fight for fame against the ruthless elements of the big city was enriched by Ann Sheridan, charming as a professional ballroom dancer; a symphony of some distinction by (I think) Max Steiner; Donald Crisp; and a brilliant sketch of a sentimental little Jewish gunman by Elia Kazan. The film deserves more attention.

Yours faithfully,  
ALFRED SHAUGHNESSY.

10 Chesham Street, S.W.1.

## MUSIC FOR THE FILMS

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND*

Sir,—Several months ago you were kind enough to appreciate in a review of *Right Cross* the brief music I composed for that film. I wonder if you have any idea how gratifying it is to find that one's work in a small film has not gone unnoticed? What pleased me most, however, was that you identified me as the composer of the score of *Force of Evil*. I am so accustomed (perhaps I should say "inured") to being introduced as the composer of *Laura* that it was a real thrill to find someone who remembers *Force of Evil* and the music I wrote for it. This is my favourite score, and the picture was, to me, a fine film, misunderstood here and mishandled by those who released and were to have exploited it.

More recently, I was delighted to learn from Mr. Antony Hopkins' even-tempered reply to Mr. Lawrence Morton's equally affable article that the score of the *Symphony of Psalms* is published in England without parts for Violins and Violas, just as it is here. Mr. Hopkins cleverly cites this to prove that Stravinsky's destiny to live in Hollywood had not yet corrupted him in 1930, and that like all "real" composers he orchestrated this work himself. Mr. Hopkins was also thoughtful enough to provide us with a measuring stick by which even the most ignorant can determine who is and who is not a "good" composer. "What", says this formula, "has the composer written for the concert hall?"

Does Mr. Hopkins mean to imply that without the existence of "PORTSMOUTH POINT" and the VIOLA CONCERTO as references, William Walton's scores for *Henry V* and *Hamlet* have no stature of their own? Should one's awareness of some anaemic little woodwind trio by Hanns Eisler colour for better or for worse our appreciation of his music for *White Floods* or *Woman on the Beach*? The score of *The Blood of a Poet* is a good one, and that of *Caesar and Cleopatra* is bad. Both are by Georges Auric, and it is my suspicion that his having composed "LES PELICANS" has nothing to do with the case. Far be it from me to argue for the opposition, but isn't Mr. Hopkins giving us much the best of it (and placing his right to call himself a critic in jeopardy) when he all but confesses that he cannot hear from the scores of *The Heiress* and *Of Mice and Men* that they are the work of a fine composer without having to refer for assurance to that composer's concert pieces? If this does not appear added to Mr. Hopkins, who am I to awaken him from his dream?

But all this is as nothing compared to the distress occasioned by the news lately smuggled into Hollywood in a copy of Forsyth's "Orchestration" by a member of the Bass-Clarinet-to-the-Fore Underground. This vile and obviously false rumour would have it that English composers do not copy the orchestra parts of their own compositions. You can imagine what a reaction this dreadful canard elicited in our country, where Charles T. Griffes is considered a better composer than Beethoven or Irving Berlin because he died after exhausting himself copying the parts of one of his works. (The Un-American Affairs Committee has recently had to scotch a Communist-inspired rumour that this was because he could not afford a copyist.)

Of course, as any true composer knows, privation is good for the artistic soul. Our conservatory juniors are taught that though malnutrition may have helped to kill Schubert, it did not harm his music. Charities here are specifically aimed to avoid practicalities such as feeding artists, in order to preserve the integrity of the unsated spirit.

The problem remains one of convincing American purists that their British colleagues would never resort to such a cheap-jack evasion of the responsibility of the true composer. Some earnest of good faith, such as a complete set of the parts of the Vaughan Williams' Symphonies in the composer's own hand, would be just the thing. If such a collection is not at the moment available, please have Vaughan Williams drop whatever he is doing and get to work upon it immediately.

And now I must close this letter. Word has just arrived via Wells-Fargo Express rider that a Cherokee raiding party, inflamed by the news that Gabriel Fauré employed orchestrators, has desecrated that composer's statue in the Stone Mountain Monument. Our Garrison leaves at dawn.

*Morituri te Salutamus!*

DAVID RAKSIN.

Northridge, California.

(More Correspondence on page 46)



# The Front Page

NEARLY TWENTY YEARS AGO, SIGHT AND SOUND began its existence as a quarterly magazine, and even at that time it was hoped to turn it as soon as possible into a monthly. The chance came finally towards the end of 1949, when the funds of the British Film Institute made this step possible; it was an experiment, but an experiment worth making, and public response emphasised this. Circulation increased, and if times had been normal, the balance-sheet would have been satisfactory; as it happened, conditions were simply not favourable. The rise in the circulation of SIGHT AND SOUND could not keep pace with a much quicker rise in the costs of paper and printing. Larger and more firmly established journals capitulated, and we soon had to consider various alternatives. We could have continued monthly publication by decreasing quality and quantity and maintaining the same price, or we could have increased the price with nothing to show for it; but we decided that an enlarged quarterly magazine, with no drop in the standard of production, offered the best solution for readers. At 3s. 6d. a quarter the annual subscription is in fact lower, and each issue offers undiminished value in these days of rising costs and rising prices.

We hope that readers appreciate the reasons behind this change, and will continue to support us as gratifyingly as in the past. Since SIGHT AND SOUND started monthly publication, its circulation has almost trebled, and for this reason the temporary setback is not discouraging. When conditions are more favourable, we hope to resume the attempt. In the meantime, while there are one or two topical functions that a quarterly, of course, cannot perform, we hope that its own advantages will appeal—a wider variety of articles and features, space for longer studies, and a more substantial survey of current production as it passes in review.

To those interested, we point out that two specific monthly features—the short guide to current films and the regular production news—will be incorporated in the British Film Institute's private subscription paper, *The Monthly Film Bulletin*, which contains full credits, synopses and reviews of entertainment and short films released in Britain each month. And finally, to those faithful addicts, we must apologise for the discontinuance of the Competition feature.

## Meeting on the Rhine

The assembly of film-makers, actors, critics, film society representatives and students at Bacharach in May was a notable success. Organised for the third year in succession by the French Cultural Branch of the Commission in Germany, for the French ciné-clubs, the activities were extended to include the German film clubs also. Film personalities—Jacques Becker, Max Ophüls, Gérard Philipe, Norman MacLaren, Paul Rotha, Wolfgang Staudte and others—mingled freely with the students, introduced their films and took part in open discussions. The occasion dispensed with all the formalities of a festival, but many outstanding films were shown: Renoir's *La Règle du Jeu*, Bresson's *Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*, *La Ronde*, *Orphée*, *Miracolo a Milano*, Becker's *Rendezvous de Juillet* and *Edouard et Caroline*, Jennings' *Listen to Britain* and *Family Portrait*, *Passport to Pimlico*, and MacLaren's short films among them. The German film clubs, which started up only a few years ago, have grown into a movement surprisingly large in numbers and enthusiasm: many films, new ones and established classics, have still not reached them, and thus the showings and discussions at Bacharach had a quality of revelation, of genuine excitement, rare at festivals. Even delegates from other countries who had seen nearly all of the films shown were not disappointed, and report Bacharach as one of the most stimulating annual events of the cinema.



# IN THE PICTURE

THE MOST IMPORTANT event of 1951 for the British film industry has, of course, been the new entertainments tax concessions agreed between various sections of the trade and Sir Wilfred Eady. To meet an increased levy, cinema seats again become more expensive and (if attendances do not drop) will bring in an extra £12,500,000 annually, of which £6,000,000 will be turned over to the industry. 2·3 millions of this will go to the producers, and 3·7 to the exhibitors. The new concessions to exhibitors are the result of united trade protests to Mr. Gaitskell's original budget, which favoured only the producers.

A special pamphlet published by the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association after Mr. Gaitskell's budget had been a documented plea for reduction. *"Too much is taken in Entertainments Taxation and not enough is left in the industry. Under the new scale, when the 1s. 10d. seat is raised to 2s., the tax will be 11d!"* In a letter to *The Times*, Mr. H. P. E. Mears, president of the C.E.A., wrote: *"It is the simple truth that some exhibitors are being forced into bankruptcy, and for all of us financial difficulties will multiply. . . . It is, we suggest, against the principles of justice and fair play that the cinema should be taxed at a rate vastly in excess of the legitimate theatre, the music hall and the football ground"*.

*The Economist*, however, considered that this "pained surprise" was "more, perhaps, than is justified. . . . There is not much evidence that the tax, though extremely high, is yet approaching the point of diminishing returns".

Nevertheless, the anomalies of the situation were recognised. Exhibitors pronounce themselves more generally satisfied than for some time; and for producers, of course, this extension of last year's Eady plan amounts to a substantial total concession. All in all, they stand to gain an extra £3,500,000 annually, and conditions for achieving economic stability are at last favourable.

Thus producers are more positively hopeful. When asked by SIGHT AND SOUND for his views on the new situation, Sir Michael Balcon answered: *"The event of the year is that the Industry has spoken with one voice. It took the shock of the Budget proposals to unite the varied interests, but united, our case influenced the Chancellor's decisions. Not that the amendments, such as the Eady plan, will bring the Millennium. But if cinema audiences do not drop, and the producers' potentially larger share does not go up in a whirlwind of inflationary spiral, they will give producers a chance to balance their accounts. One great flaw remains: the shortage of capital for production. Unless the N.F.F.C. is given additional funds to secure the firm foundations it has laid, producers will not be able to use the improved conditions to full advantage"*.

\*

*"The idea of Hollywood turning to television is not at all novel to the film industry"*, remarked a recent issue of *Variety*, quoting with approval an old proverb: *"If you can't lick 'em, join 'em"*. An important business merger—between the American Broadcasting Company and United Paramount Theatres—has, at any rate, created a precedent for the two usually antagonistic media, and given rise to much fluctuating speculation. *"There are signs"*, the *New York Times* was moved to remark, *"that television will actually come to the rescue of the motion picture industry. . . . There can be little question that a new period in screen entertainment has opened and that the motion picture industry may yet hail television as its salvation"*.

Other events have occasioned further speculation: the salary cuts imposed by 20th Century-Fox, ranging from 15 to 50 per cent. on its top executives, producers, directors, and actors (*"tough on a lot of people"*, as Miss Betty Grable is

reported to have said); the dickering with a sell-out on the part of the Warner Brothers—whose decision to leave the industry was reversed at the last moment; and the announcement that *The March of Time* will shortly cease production for the cinema and transfer itself to television. In spite of all this, *Variety*—two weeks after its pronouncements on television—was celebrating Hollywood's record summer production (*"158 Pix Roll in 13 Weeks"*) and remarking: *"All except the most confirmed diehards also believe that the wailing of the last few months was badly overdone. . . . Hollywood is determined to hit the existing market hard and squarely during the 1951-52 releasing year"*.

\*

Over a year ago, the production of children's entertainment films in Britain was found to be uneconomic and suspended by the Rank Organisation: now, as a result of the work of a provisional committee, a new organisation is to be set up to produce children's films, and promote their distribution and exhibition. It will be financed from the British Film Production Fund, which will turn over 5 per cent. (about £60,000 this year) of its annual revenue to the new non-profit-making company, Children's Film Foundation Ltd. The board of directors will consist of three representatives from each of the industry's main associations—the Association of Specialised Film Producers, the British Film Producers' Association, the Cinematograph Exhibitors' Association and the Kinematograph Renters' Society.

Mr. L. G. Parker, secretary of the A.S.F.P., has been appointed temporary secretary and the Executive Officer—responsible for preparing production programmes, approving scripts, and supervising actual production—is Miss Mary Field, already well known for her achievements in this field when the Rank Organisation sponsored children's films, and whose experience and knowledge will obviously be essential to the new organisation.

At the moment, the organisation is still in the planning stage, and its scope will be limited at first by its capital—though it is intended, as revenue comes in from the films, to use it for further production: but, as the Foundation's press statement points out, it is *"the industry as a whole, realising the urgent need for these films, that has itself decided to subsidise production. . . . By the continued co-operation of all sections of the industry, it can confidently be expected to develop the scale of its operations and increasingly satisfy the demand for first class entertainment films for children"*.

\*

The Congress of the International Federation of Film Clubs and Academies (founded at Venice last year by Vittorio de Sica and René Clair) ran concurrently with that of the International Federation of Film Archives in Cambridge during July. M. Clair himself attended the Congress, and other delegates and observers included G. W. Pabst, Alexandre Arnoux, S. Contini, Thorold Dickinson, Paul Rotha, Ronald Neame, Kay Mander, Jill Craigie, and the two vice-presidents, Denis Forman and Roger Manvell. This will be discussed in the next issue of SIGHT AND SOUND.

\*

It is sad to record the sudden death, at the age of 67, of Robert Flaherty, whose *Nanook of the North*, *Moana*, and *Louisiana Story* placed him among the greatest of film makers. A memorial programme of his films is planned to take place in London in late September: an article on him will appear in the next SIGHT AND SOUND.





## UP AND COMING

Centre, below: Marge and Gower Champion, an engaging new American dance team, do much to enliven the recent musical, *Show Boat*. After Broadway successes in dancing and choreography, Gower Champion won a Hollywood contract but was left idle: later he returned with his wife, to appear in *Mr. Music* and then *Show Boat*. Next, *Lovely to Look At*.



Above: Viveca Lindfors. Hollywood apparently spied her talents in some dull Swedish films, but only rewarded her with not too good parts in not too good pictures (*To the Victor, No Sad Songs for Me, Dark City*). Now, under the Swiss director Leopold Lindtberg, she comes into her own with a sensitive and touching performance in *Four in a Jeep*, that—one hopes—will show other producers the light. She is now making a film for an American company in Vienna.



Above, Daniel Gélin. A few years ago a stage revival in Paris of *Les Parents Terribles*, and a part in Becker's *Rendezvous de Juillet*, revealed a young actor of outstanding gifts. Now England has appreciated him in *La Ronde*, in which he stands out clearly from an outstanding cast. Two other films in which he plays brilliantly, Becker's *Edouard et Caroline* and Delannoy's *Dieu a Besoin des Hommes*, should be seen here soon. Now he is making *Le Plaisir* for Max Ophüls.



Left, Richard Brooks. After some years of writing—the original novel of *Crossfire*, collaborations on the scripts of *Brute Force*, *Mystery Street*, *Key Largo*, *Storm Warning*—he made a more than promising debut as writer-director with *Crisis*. Now, one is glad to hear, he has written and directed a new film, *The Light Touch*, with Pier Angeli, Stewart Granger, George Sanders.

Right, Geraldine Brooks. A striking performance in *Possessed*, and another of unmistakable nervous power in *The Reckless Moment*, established her as one of Hollywood's most interesting young actresses. Since then, she has made two films in Europe: *Vulcano*, with Anna Magnani, and *The White Road*, shot in Nice under the direction of Rudolph Mate.







Above: the Dormouse emerges during the Mad Hatter's tea party in Disney's film of *Alice in Wonderland*, now showing in London. This latest production was a project of many years' standing: devotees of Carroll will find omissions, deviations, and a general substitution of the cute for the grotesque. Saddest omission is the Duchess, and the whole Victorian element. *Wonderland* has become *Disneyland*.

Above and below: the Stanley Kramer production of *Cyrano de Bergerac*, with Jose Ferrer, shortly to be premiered in London. This, one of the boldest of recent Hollywood experiments, was directed by Michael Gordon (Another Part of the Forest, An Act of Murder), photographed by Franz Planer (Maskerade, Liebeleil, Letter from an Unknown Woman), designed by Rudolph Sternad and adapted from Rostand by Carl Foreman, who has scripted the previous Kramer films. Mala Powers (below) plays Roxane. Kramer, who has recently extended his activities under a new contract, is now preparing *My Six Convicts*, and *Death of a Salesman*, with Fredric March.

## HOLLYWOOD

### New Productions

René Clair returns to direct (for R.K.O.) an adaptation of *Pilate's Wife*, the Claire Boothe Luce story about the impact of Christ on his contemporaries. The authoress is writing the script, and the producers are Jerry Wald and Norman Krasna.

*Viva Zapata*, Elia Kazan's new film, is a biography of the Mexican missionary Zapata, who will be played by Marlon Brando. Margo, Anthony Quinn and Jean Peters are other members of the cast. The film, produced by Darryl Zanuck for Fox, will be shot largely in Mexico.

Richard Brooks, writer-director of *Crisis*, is now filming a romantic comedy, *The Light Touch*, in Sicily. Leading players are Pier Angeli (as a painter) and Stewart Granger (as a swindler). Studio work will be done at M.G.M. in Hollywood.

Joseph L. Mankiewicz writes and directs a remake of a German film shown at the Venice Festival last year, *The Doctor Praetorius Story*. The setting is a hospital, the story concerns a doctor who becomes the victim of a whispering campaign. Players are Cary Grant and Jeanne Crain. (Fox)

New films on Communist activities in America include *I was a Communist for the F.B.I.*, the story of an undercover agent who posed for nine years as a Party worker in the Pittsburgh steel mills for the F.B.I., and whose adventures were printed in the "Saturday Evening Post". A Warners film, directed by Gordon Douglas, it is played by Frank Lovejoy and Dorothy Hart. Leo McCarey's film for Paramount, *My Son John* brings Helen Hayes back to the screen as the mother of a family of which one son, Van Heflin, becomes involved with Communism.

Fantasy, interplanetary and prehistoric, also continues. *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (Fox), with Michael Rennie and Patricia Neal, is being directed by Robert Wise: *Five*, produced and directed by Arch Oboler, a radio writer, for Columbia, tells the adventures of the last five people left in the world after an atomic disaster: *The Thing* (produced by Howard Hawks, directed by Christian Nyby, at R.K.O.) and *The Man from Planet X* (directed by Edgar G. Ulmer for United Artists) both concern disagreeable intruders from the cosmos. The first is "all about a ghastly creature up at the North Pole, which is vegetable not human but prefers a diet of human blood". The second is described as "the WEIRDEST visitor the Earth has ever seen". Finally, *Prehistoric Women* deals with a group of 1,000,000 B.C. cave-girls who discover cave-men.







Above: two scenes from *Olivia*, an adaptation of the book published last year, made by Jacqueline Audry. In this story of a young girl's infatuation with a schoolmistress at a Paris finishing school fifty years ago, Edwige Feuillère (above) plays Mademoiselle Julie, and Danielle Délorme the girl Olivia. Simone Simon (lefthand still) plays Mademoiselle Cara.

## PARIS

Few people outside France had heard of the "Commission Supérieure Technique" until it awarded a prize for technical achievement to *The Tales of Hoffmann* at this year's Cannes Festival.

As it happens, the C.S.T. is a rather important organisation, and has tasks more important than the awarding of an annual prize. The Commission was founded in 1944 with the object of improving by every possible means the existing facilities for film-making. In view of the pitiful state in which the French studios were left after the war, its work had an enormous range. If a number of remarkable films were made in the immediate post-war period with obsolete and incredibly worn-out equipment, much of the credit is due to the help rendered by the Commission's experts and its steadily expanding research organisation. To-day the C.S.T. co-ordinates the work of no less than 13 sub-commissions which study particular problems of the cinema, and it maintains a permanent advice bureau equipped to cope with all queries from technicians, producers or exhibitors.

Without the Commission's persistent efforts the remarkable feat of efficiency demonstrated to me recently by Christian Matras in the Joinville studio might not have been possible. He explained that the Gevacolor process used for Christian-Jaque's new picture *Barbe Bleue* requires lighting ten times stronger than the usual black and white film. When I asked whether this did not lead to an over-heating of the studio he replied with an impressive object lesson. "Look at your watch and see how long it takes us to switch the lights on and off!" He blew his whistle, and within 11 seconds the set representing the vast dining hall of a medieval castle was flooded with dazzling glare. Another blow of the whistle and in 7 seconds several scores of sunlights high in the roof faded out again. The film is being made simultaneously in French and German versions. While Cecile Aubry plays the main feminine part in both versions, Pierre Brasseur as Barbe-Bleu and Jean Debucourt as the "Majordome" are replaced in the German version by Hans Albers and Fritz Kortner respectively. The location scenes have been shot in Austria.

FRANCIS KOVAL.

Below: designs by Wakhevitch for the Gevacolor film of *Barbe Bleue*: two costumes, and the interior and exterior of Bluebeard's castle. Wakhevitch, one of Europe's most talented film and theatre designers, did the sets for *Les Visiteurs du Soir*, *La Marseillaise*, *L'Eternel Retour*, also for the Covent Garden production of Boris Godounov, and the Cocteau ballet, *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort*.







Two scenes from "Scrooge", now in production: left, the death of Marley, with Michael Hordern as Marley and Alastair Sim as Scrooge. Right, scavengers after the death: Louise Hampton, Ernest Thesiger, Kathleen Harrison, Miles Malleson.

## LONDON

Perhaps the most interesting current activity in British production is the news of five new films started by Group 3 Limited, the company backed by the National Film Finance Corporation to experiment in low budget work developing fresh talent, with a board of directors comprising Sir Michael Balcon, John Grierson, John Baxter and J. H. Lawrie.

The first film is *Judgment Deferred*, produced and directed by John Baxter, the production controller of Group 3. This will be followed by *Brandy for the Parson*, a comedy thriller written by Geoffrey Household, to be directed by John Eldridge, already known for his documentaries *Waverley Steps* and *3 Days to Sydney*, with Grierson as executive producer. Jill Craigie, who made *Out of Chaos* and *Blue Scar*, will write and direct a comedy about the efforts of a small seaside town's mayor to increase the tourist trade and promote social life for the lonelier inhabitants, called *The Lonely Hearts Convention*. A spy story with a London background, *Mr. Wrigley's Case*, will be made by

Frank Worth, director of *Ha'Penny Breeze*; and *What God Forgot*, a story by Montagu Slater based on the Knockshinnoch colliery disaster. The director of this will be Phil Leacock, who has made films for the Crown Film Unit, including *Out of True* and *Life in her Hands*.

Other current productions are Robert Hamer's adaptation of *His Excellency*, with Eric Portman, now on the floor at Ealing; Frank Launder is under way, for London Films, with *Lady Godiva Rides Again*, the story of a beauty queen, with Pauline Stroud making her first film appearance and the inimitable Diana Dors as another competitor; Brian Desmond Hurst's *Scrooge*, a George Minter production, with Alastair Sim. Projects likely to be realised in the near future are David Lean's aeronautical story, *The Sound Barrier*, with a script by Terence Rattigan, and *Diamond Rose*, a comedy of jewel thieves written by Simon Harcourt-Smith, Peter de Sarigny and Thorold Dickinson, to be directed by the latter.

## ROME

*Il Cammino della Speranza (The Road to Hope)*, the story of a group of unemployed Sicilian miners who leave their homes in search of a new life—trekking through Italy, across the Alps, and over the border to find work in France—is the most recent film of Pietro Germi, who made *In the Name of the Law*. It has been awarded a Silver Laurel Award, and is thus a final contestant for the Selznick Golden Laurel (for the film considered to contribute most to human understanding and to portray most truthfully aspects of national life), which will be announced at the end of August, during the Venice Film Festival.

The leading players are Elena Varzi and Raf Vallone, both seen in the still.





# JAMES JOYCE AND THE CINEMA

Patricia Hutchins

*What would have happened if James Joyce had remained within the cinema?*

He was once an exhibitor who brought early Italian films to Dublin from Trieste: much later he assisted Stuart Gilbert with a script based on the Anna Livia episode of *Finnegans Wake*. Eisenstein frequently refers to the influence of Joyce's work, and his heavily annotated copy of *Ulysses* suggests that he considered using it as the basis for a film.

By 1909, when Joyce helped to open the first cinema in Dublin, he had already passed that turning—to a school of medicine in Ireland or at the Sorbonne—which would perhaps have bent his gifts towards psychology. (Could Jung have become a kind of Joyce had the same difficulties come his way?) Might not the Irish writer's interest in music and the theatre have eventually carried him into film-making, even television . . . ?

Such speculations are not altogether useless. The present is like a car travelling an unmarked plain; only by looking back does the road seem to shape itself from the possibilities behind us.

While preparing an essay on the writer's early Dublin background, I went to see the building in Mary Street which had been altered into a cinema by Joyce and his associates and which, after they withdrew from the venture, continued to exhibit films until quite recently. It was shored up during the demolition of a neighbouring house, and padlocked gates shut us off from the interior. The well-chosen little facade, with its classical garlands, the small-paned windows of the box-office, remained unchanged. A passer-by told us that until a year or so ago, the doorman who had been there since its inception had lived in the neighbourhood.

Herbert Gorman, in his definitive biography, tells how James Joyce met four business men in Trieste, during the period when he was teaching in the Berlitz school there. This group controlled two cinemas in Trieste and one in Bucharest. Antonio Machnich was an upholsterer who had invented a new type of sofa bed; Giovanni Rebez was a leather merchant; Giuseppe Caris a draper, and Francesco Novak of Pirano owned a cycle shop. At that period the film was passing from the fairground phase into quasi-respectability. Production in England had not yet become the means of profitable investment, but a number of films were being made in Italy. This was probably the chief source of supply for neighbouring countries.

On October 21st, 1909, Joyce had returned to Ireland under contract to the Societa formed by these gentlemen, with the object of opening cinemas in Dublin, Belfast and Cork. For a time, as Gorman puts it, "Joyce the business man superseded Joyce the artist". Dr. Richard Best, of the National Library, noticed that Joyce did not fail to let him see a wad of notes in his pocket-book, and that he seemed much more spruce than the touchy young man he had known some years before.

There was a great deal to do and Joyce found little time for the pubs and literary discussions of his student days. He was kept busy examining possible premises and interviewing the theatre inspector about a licence, enquiring about regulations. Eventually it was decided to lease a house in Mary Street, near the main thoroughfare of Sackville Street, and to make certain structural alterations. One of Joyce's sisters living in Dublin can remember "Jim" working in the first floor room which served as an office.



James Joyce (probably at Ostende) in the 1920's

There was bother with the landlord, the builders, technicians; there were staff to engage, posters to design, advertising to arrange.

In November three of the partners arrived, without a word of English, and were taken on a fruitless journey to Cork and Belfast in search of other premises. John Stanislaus Joyce, the writer's father, looked on with amusement. He described one of the partners, who evidently knew something about projection, as "that hairy mechanic in a lion-tamer's coat"—so apt a description that it remained a family joke.

In spite of many difficulties the Volta—named in honour of Alessandro Volta—was to open on the Monday of Christmas week. Half an hour before the first public performance the electrician was found to have disappeared and Joyce had to search the town for a substitute. By that time there was such a large crowd competing to enter that police were called to control the situation.

In an article published in *Indiu* (Dublin, December 15th, 1950), Proinsias O Conluain, who has made a study of the cinema in Ireland, draws attention to notices published in the papers following the opening of the Volta.

"The hall in which the display takes place", noted the *Freeman's Journal*, "is most admirably equipped for the purpose . . . . Perhaps its special feature is that it is of Italian origin, and is in that respect somewhat out of the ordinary . . . . As an initial experiment it was remarkably good, remembering how difficult it is to produce with absolute completeness a series of pictures at the first stage of their location in new surroundings . . . The chief pictures shown were *The First Paris Orphanage*, *La Pouponniere*, and *The Tragic Story of Beatrice Cenci*. The latter, though very excellent, was hardly as exhilarating a subject as one could desire on the eve of the festive season but it was very much appreciated and applauded. An excellent little string orchestra played charmingly during the afternoon. Mr. James Joyce, who is in charge of the exhibition, has worked apparently indefatigably in its production and deserves to be congratulated . . ."

Hitherto films had been part of a variety show or lecture. Now they were available every hour from 5 p.m. with a change of programme twice weekly in "the most elegant



# SKETCH OF A SCENARIO OF ANNA LIVIA PLURABELLE

Stuart Gilbert

The river Liffey on the outskirts of Dublin. Two old Irish washerwomen are scrubbing and beating clothes on opposite banks of the river (which is only a yard or so wide at this point), talking to each other as they work. First the two old women are seen together, at a distance; then separately, close-up.

Washerwoman No. 2 leans forward to pick up a shirt from the water; her head hits that of No. 1 as she stoops.

She holds up an enormous shirt. Close-up of the shirt. The monogram "H.C.E." is visible on it. It is dirty, covered with stains.

She throws the shirt across the stream to No. 1.

No. 1 starts washing the shirt. It is so large that she has to make an immense effort to haul it out of the stream.

No. 2 points to the horizon. Both women look upstream. The horizon rapidly approaches, showing a tall, triangular hill outlined against storm-clouds. Flashes of lightning. The mountain is gradually covered with clouds which condense into a man, the Big Man (H.C.E.). He is staggering down a rock road, carrying a lantern. A close-up of the lantern shows that it is really a parrot-cage with a parrot in it. Presently he stops and looks at the cage. He rubs a tinder, strikes a light, and opens the door of the cage. The parrot flies out. The Big Man roars with laughter.

(His laughter is drowned by a clap of thunder). We watch the parrot flying across the rocky hillside, catching glimpses of it by lightning-flashes. The Big Man stumbles along in pursuit. As the bird

flies to and fro against a leaden-hued background, it leaves a black line (rather like "sky-writing" by a 'plane. A 'plane might be substituted for the bird, if possible). A close-up of the line thus described shows that it is a skeleton map, a plan of old Dublin. The plan fades out. The Big Man is lurching along in pursuit of the parrot.

Presently he comes to a pool of water in the rocks, a spring; it brims over a rocky ledge into a little waterfall. Waterfall effects, mist and spray. The Big Man stands in front of the waterfall and gazes at it intently. Through the veil of water a little girl steps forth, Anna Livia (Ann). He tries to catch her hand. She runs away, registers shyness. Scene of pursuit. At last he catches her and begins to caress her. He draws her on to his knee. The light grows faint. The Big Man gradually forms into a mountain; his knees are a ledge of rock on which Ann is sitting. She gradually fades out into a waterfall.

Flash back to the two washerwomen on the banks of the stream.

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## Sound Track

*Running water*

*Splashes*

*Sound of the impact of their heads*

*Loud crashes as No. 1 beats the shirt with her "battle"*

*Thunder  
Wind*

*Heavy footsteps*

*Falling rocks*

*Laughter. Thunder*

*Sound of airplane*

*Heavy footsteps*

*Sound of waterfall*

*Noise of clothes being beaten*

*Sound of waves growling louder and louder.*

WASHERWOMAN No. 1: O tell me all about Anna Livia. I want to hear all about Anna Livia.

WASHERWOMAN No. 2: Yes, of course, we all know Anna Livia.

No. 1: Tell me all. Tell me now. Tuck up your sleeves and loosen your talk-tapes. And don't butt me—hike!—when you bend!

No. 2: He's an awful old reppe. Look at the shirt of him! Look at the dirt of it! He has all my water black on me.

No. 1: Yes, H.C.E. they call him. Here Comes Everybody.

No. 2: Wallop it well with your battle and clean it. My wrists are wrusty rubbing the mouldaw stains.

No. 1: O, the roughy old rappe! Minxing marriage and making loof.

No. 2: And the cut of him! And the strut of him! How he used to hold his head as high as a howeth, the famous eld duke alien, with a hump of grandeur on him like a walking rat. By dredgerous lands and devious delts he raped her home, playing caught and mythed with the gleam of her shadda, the quaggy waag for stumbling.

No. 1: Who sold you that Jackalantern's tale? Pemmican's pasty pie!

In a gabbard he barqued it, the boat of life, from the harbourless Ivernican Okean, till he spied the loom of his landfall and he loosed two croakers from under his tilt, the gran Phenician rover.



hall in Dublin", for 6d., 4d. and 2d., children half price. One of Joyce's sisters remembers seeing a film on Francesca da Rimini, which seems to have impressed her, and from advertisements in the *Evening Mail* in January and February 1910 a number of other Italian films were shown at the Volta—*The Tragic Story of Beatrice Cenci*, *Nero*, A Sensational Dramatic Story of Ancient Rome, *Manoeuvres of the Italian Navy in the Mediterranean*, *Alboino*, King of Ancient Lombardy . . . with such attractions as *Fatal Forgetfulness*, and *The Abduction of Miss Berrilli*!

The cinema was doing well, but unfortunately Joyce's eyesight was again giving him trouble and he wished to see a doctor in Trieste. His family there were in danger of being evicted from their flat by a landlord impatient for his rent. Thus early in 1910 Joyce left Dublin. For five months Novak, the cycle dealer, carried on at the Volta; but it was all too difficult for him. Joyce fought hard against the partners' decision to sell out to an English company, but in June his participation in the Societa came to an end.

One more attempt to keep in touch with Irish life had failed: he was an "exile", remember, not an immigrant. His next and most embittering disappointment was the destruction of the first edition of *Dubliners* by the Irish printers; and in 1912 he left Ireland for good—though the word here is an odd one. Would the successful exhibitor have crowded out the artist in Joyce: could he have lived in Ireland on his own terms? Much of the edge and vigour of his final portrait of Stephen Dadaalus is due to the renewal and overlaying of his sense of youthful frustration, arising from those ventures, literary and commercial, into which he had put so much energy and hope.

As Joyce knew very well, events are part of a spiral, not a straight line. Therefore any point of impact upon the past is of value as a centre from which to work outwards. To study in greater detail the implications of this small, almost forgotten episode of the Volta might be to stumble on something larger, to see a local event as part of Europe's social history. For instance, it would be interesting to try to trace the subsequent careers of Messrs. Machnich, Rebez, Caris and Francesco Novak. Did they return to their previous professions, or become large cinema proprietors as the film business continued to expand? Perhaps a septuagenarian, having seen so many changes in Trieste, may still remember something of the months passed in that strange damp country of Ireland, where promises are so easily made—and forgotten.

As for James Joyce, though he may have seen films at Zurich during the war years, it was not until he was living in Paris, after 1920, that scraps of information emerge again. In spite of increasing difficulties with his eyes, he appears to have gone fairly frequently to the cinema, usually between dusk and dinner time when he could no longer work. Paul Leon or Joyce's son and daughter-in-law usually accompanied him. Madame Jolas remembers how they discussed *Man of Aran*, which Joyce appears to have liked very much; also *Wuthering Heights*, arising perhaps from his admiration for Emily Bronte. At the same time, she emphasises, one must not give these chance recollections the importance of definite preferences.

*Ulysses*, published in 1922, had already influenced much contemporary writing by the 'thirties, and it would be interesting to trace the infiltration of the consciously used interior monologue into the early sound film. In Eisenstein's first treatment of a sequence from Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*, published in *The Film Sense*, a summary is made of the thoughts of a man contemplating murder, at times

becoming voices which combine with the ripple of the water. Hitchcock's *Blackmail* is, of course, the much quoted milestone on the road to *Citizen Kane*, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, and many subsequent productions in which the device is used.

In *Film Form* Eisenstein mentions Joyce in a footnote to a discussion on *The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram*, in dealing with traits of Japanese culture which he found to be, as it were, "within the cinema", although actually represented in the changes which have taken place in writing, art and literature in Japan. "It has been left to Joyce to develop in literature the depictive line of the Japanese hieroglyph". Later Eisenstein prefaces *A Course in Treatment*, summarising his work for the State Cinema Institute, with a quotation from *Ulysses*.

In emphasising the need to study the creative process, the way of putting together ideas, impressions, forms, which has been used by many great minds, Eisenstein has, significantly enough, coupled Joyce with Emile Zola. Reading his general comments, one is struck by the fact that what is poor and pretentious in the expensively made American film, and many of our own, arises from mental undernourishment, a form of cultural vitamin deficiency. Research departments and potted knowledge stores are no substitute for the individual's pursuit of facts, ideas, new ways of seeing.

James Joyce and Sergei Eisenstein met in Paris during the winter of 1930, according to notes kindly made available by Marie Seton, whose biography of the director will be published (by John Lane, The Bodley Head) next autumn. Eisenstein told her that hearing Joyce read passages of *Ulysses* made his former understanding seem superficial. Here, he knew, was one of the most remarkable men he had ever met. In *Film Form* he says that Joyce "was intensely interested in my plans for the interior film-monologue, with a far broader scope than is afforded by literature. Despite his almost total blindness, Joyce wishes to see those parts of *Potemkin* and *October* that, with the expressive means of film culture, move along kindred lines".

In excerpts from lectures at the Institute of Cinematography in the autumn of 1934, to be reproduced by Marie Seton, Eisenstein again declares that "We must study Joyce". He turns to analyse the "microscopic method" used in *Ulysses* which is "not only a scientific manner of work, but it is the scientific method applied to art". It seems there had been some question of translating Joyce into Russian but, owing to condemnatory remarks by Radek, then editor of *Izvestia*, the project was dropped. "I was furious at Radek's speech", Eisenstein noted, "when I analysed it, I found it to be a conventional interpretation of Joyce . . . Joyce extends the line commenced by Balzac. We require to study his experiments profoundly. I feel *Work in Progress* is retrogressive; now Joyce can go no further in literature".

Elsewhere Eisenstein had declared that "only the film element commands a means for an adequate presentation of the whole course of thought through a disturbed mind". He points out that "when an art ventures outside its own frame, the very basis which holds it together is broken". In an analysis of *Finnegans Wake*, he speaks of Joyce's heroic attempt to solve the problem with a special dual-level method of writing and if at times the effect is astounding, "the price paid is the entire dissolution of the very foundation of literary diction, the entire decomposition of literary method itself; for the lay reader the text has been turned into abracadabra".



Meanwhile, in Paris, Joyce was discussing film projects with Stuart Gilbert, and they agreed that only Eisenstein or Walter Ruttmann could put *Ulysses* on the screen. One day, as Stuart Gilbert was doing the English dialogue for *Les Perles de la Couronne*, Joyce accompanied him to the studios. After being introduced to Guitry, he appears to have talked to the elderly actor Ermete Zacconi, who played Clement VII and had been associated with films in Italy since 1912. Could there have been a link here—Joyce was so tenacious of the past—with his sojourn in Rome, even with the Italian films for the Dublin cinema project?

Somewhere between 1934 and 1935 Joyce and Stuart Gilbert were in touch with a Hungarian director—name as yet untraced—who planned a film to be based on the Anna Livia episode of *Finnegan's Wake*. Part of a draft scenario, covering the first seven pages, was reproduced in the James Joyce Year Book.\* This was accompanied by a note in which Stuart Gilbert points out that it was undertaken at the request, and with the encouragement, of James Joyce, "who was kind enough to make a number of suggestions for its improvement—all of which, needless to say, were embodied in the text".

As Stuart Gilbert agrees, this is an "ideal" scenario rather than one written with an eye to practical considerations. It would perhaps require a technique something like *Night on a Bare Mountain*, in which dream images just emerge from darkness to disappear again, the whole relying on association of shapes and images rather than direct statement.

It seems that Joyce remarked in passing one day that he had seen a film on astronomy before writing the Penelope episode of *Ulysses*. This suggested that he should give the thoughts of Marian Bloom something of the rhythm of the moon's movement which he had seen there. Like many other writers, there were times when he felt the pitiable limitations of words. But the cinema did not develop as fast as Joyce, or we might have had films rather than books from him. In his later work the visual symbols of *A Portrait . . .* and *Ulysses* have been overlaid by sound. It is in the babble of conversation in a restaurant or hearing the voices in a river that we realise the on-flow of experience which he tried to convey. Later his work, like that of Virginia Woolf, will surely influence the new medium—television. In 1926, as though predicting this, she wrote in an article on The Cinema,†

Something abstract, something that moves with controlled and conscious art, something which calls for the very slightest help from words or music to make itself intelligible, yet justly uses them subserviently—of such movement and abstractions the films may in time come to be composed. Then indeed when some new symbol for expressing thought is found, the film-maker has enormous riches at his command.

. . . the dream architecture of arches and battlements, of cascades falling and fountains rising, which sometimes visits us in sleep or shapes itself in half-darkened rooms, could be realised before our waking eyes. No fantasy could be too far-fetched or insubstantial. The past could be unrolled, distances annihilated. . . .

How all this is to be attempted, much less achieved, no one at the moment can tell us. We get intimations only in the chaos of streets, perhaps, when some momentary assembly of colour, sound, movement, suggests that here is a scene waiting a new art to be trans-fixed. And sometimes at the cinema in the midst of its immense dexterity and enormous technical proficiency, the curtain parts and we behold, far off, some unknown and unexpected beauty.

\* Transition Press, Paris, 1950.

† *The Captain's Death Bed, and Other Essays*. (Hogarth Press, 1950).

# 

Bette  
Davis

Gavin  
Lambert

Bette Davis, specially  
drawn by Richard Win-  
nington

Opposite: four studies of  
an actress. Top left: "Mr.  
Skeffington" (1944). Top  
right: "The Little Foxes"  
(1941). Below left:  
"Watch on the Rhine"  
(1943). Below right: "In  
This Our Life" (1942)



CLEARLY IT'S GOING to be a difficult shot, the all-but climactic scene of *Another Man's Poison* being made at Walton studios. It has taken Robert Krasker and the camera crew over an hour to line it up, and then the camera, mounted on a crane, has to rehearse its movements with those of the players, Bette Davis and Gary Merrill. The scene begins at the top of a staircase: Miss D., playing a lady novelist who has murdered her first husband, is pleading with her second not to desert her after she has attempted to poison him also. She plays the scene walking backwards down the stairs, trying to bar Merrill's way: at the bottom, when she has failed, she collapses, then suddenly turns round in a last effort to persuade him to come back.

While the lining-up continues, Bette Davis makes one appearance on the set in her costume—riding breeches, white blouse, blue cardigan—to inspect progress. With her light brown hair worn long, as in *All About Eve*, and her air of grim concentration before the big scene, she looks very Margo Channing. The mouth is determinedly set, the large, round blue eyes gaze at nothing in particular with formidable intensity. She doesn't say anything. A few minutes later she has gone.

This is traditional. Before an exacting scene she has to concentrate in solitude, and she appears again for rehearsal with energies fully primed for release. She goes through the scene with Gary Merrill, and gives as much in a run-through as many actresses do in a take. "He (the first husband) was dead before he fell into the tarn? He was completely dead, wasn't he? WASN'T HE?" Merrill demands.

The eyes lower and look up again, the mouth quivers, then the whole head, but she doesn't budge an inch from her position on the stair. "Yes", she answers, now looking









straight at him—implying it doesn't matter now, she will stop at nothing to keep him. ("Nobody's as good as Bette when she's bad", is one of the latest poster slogans.) The arrogance, the assurance, the complete indifference to guilt, are no less superb for being familiar. Now, suddenly, she is shaking Merrill, pleading with him, the voice growing strained and hoarse, eyes, mouth, hands and shoulders all moving feverishly—then she breaks off (the silence, the suspended tension, are almost positive), looks down, shakes her head, says quietly:

"You're going faster, Gary, twice as fast as you did in the first rehearsal. I'm too far down the stairs now—I shouldn't be here until . . ."

And we realise, through all this, she has been counting the stairs.

Merrill, though, doesn't see how this can be: but she is sure about it, and wants to start again. "You see, if you take it like this, I have to rattle my lines—I mustn't speak too fast—this is very difficult for me, Gary—I'm going backwards—I have to judge it . . ." A pause, then she is gripping his shoulders and shaking him violently, so that one thinks for a moment she wants to emphasise what she is saying—but, of course, she has started trying the scene again.

They rehearse five or six times. At the point where she originally broke off, she always looks round to make sure she is on the right stair, nods, carries on. They play the scene right down to the foot of the stairs, where she collapses, breathing heavily. If she fluffs, she says "Er—er—er" keeping the scene going, gesturing, not letting up, remembering the line in a moment and carrying on.

She decides to rehearse the movement and timing of her last appeal—they will cut on her turn. She works it out there and then. "What's she doing? She's making one last attempt to keep him—she turns—like that—yes, she *must* turn like that—that's it . . ."

The whole scene is rehearsed for the camera, and proves to be difficult. The crane shot cannot be one fluid movement, the camera must pause when the actors pause, to keep them properly framed. At one point it looks so difficult that the director, Irving Rapper, suggests breaking it into two, and cutting halfway down the stairs. But she would rather play it in one continuous take.

The camera operator explains the difficulties to her. She looks at him, listening intently, cigarette in hand, turns down the corners of her mouth. "Well, I don't know, I don't know about that. It's your problem". She goes up the stairs with Merrill, and starts rehearsing the whole scene again.

They repeat it for the camera, and this time Krasker is satisfied. "Hi-ya, transatlantic"! Merrill waves to him, as he stands suspended in mid-air on the crane. Then he goes up



Some comparative studies. Top row, left to right: "Front Page Woman" (1934), "Dangerous" (1935), "The Old Maid" (1939), "Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex" (1939). On the left: top, Bette Davis in her first film "Bad Sister" (in which she played the good sister): below, with Mary Astor in "The Great Lie". Right: the heroine of "Now Voyager", before and after psychoanalysis







the stairs, where Miss D. waits for another run-through. By now, they have played it eight times.

The producer, Daniel Angel, and his partner Douglas Fairbanks, have arrived on the set. "This is going to be wonderful", Rapper tells them.

A take. Halfway through, she fluffs—"I'm terribly sorry"—and sits down on the stairs. On the second take, she and Merrill get slightly out of position and the operator stops it halfway through. Rapper shows signs of impatience, and Miss D. exclaims "Christ, it's hot"! but after quickly checking on her make-up she is leaning over the bannisters, smiling: "No, Irving. Let's do it again for you (the camera crew). Let's do it once more with Jerry".

In a momentary silence the voice of the sound man, calm, matter-of-fact, is distinctly heard across the set. "I shall be rather glad", he is observing to the continuity girl, "when this shot is over".

Then a peal of laughter from the top of the stairs, and the actress peers over. "Gary says . . ." Some joke follows, both she and Merrill laugh.

Another take: the intensity of her acting seems to increase with repetition. "*You said we'd be safe together—you were right—you've been right all through*"! He rejects her, pushing roughly past her, and there she is again at the foot of the stairs, desperate, heaving, about to cry out after him. . . .

Rapper is pleased. So is the camera crew. Just one more for safety—and this goes well, too. Rapper turns to Angel, then back to Miss D., smiling, delighted, exclaiming: "That was wonderful, Bette!"

But she is hardly listening. She is still lying at the foot of the stairs, where the scene leaves her. She has rehearsed and played the scene continuously for nearly two hours, and she has thought about it for longer than that. She has smoked over a dozen cigarettes halfway down. Is she tired?

"Oh, brother"! she says.

## II

This, then, was one of the most remarkable actresses that the cinema has yet produced, in action. One had heard, of course, about the nervous pitch at which she worked: the temperament combined with astonishing energy and

conscientiousness: the working *at* a part, getting inside it, with the kind of tenacity an athlete brings to his training: and it was all true. "Bette's interested in the *creation* of a part", Rapper says, drawing a parallel with another actress, Barbara Stanwyck, with whom he has worked. "*She's* much more interested in the execution. But with Bette, recreating's the whole thing . . ."

As a director who began in the theatre, and who admits he is not interested in the cinema as stylistic narrative in its own right, but likes "to hear the lines come out", he understands



More comparative studies. Top row, left to right: "All This and Heaven too" (1940), "Deception" (1946), "June Bride" (1948) and "Beyond the Forest" (1949)

On the right: above, with James Davis in "Winter Meeting" (1948). and below, with Gary Merrill in "All About Eve" (1950). Bette Davis' Academy Awards were for "Dangerous" and "Jezebel" (see next page)







Favourites: "Dark Victory" and "Jezebel" (Academy Award), with Henry Fonda

and appreciates this. Most of the directors with whom Bette Davis has worked in recent years—Vincent Sherman, Edmund Goulding (both originally stage actors), Brethaign Windust—have similar sympathies. The films (*Old Acquaintance*, *The Corn is Green*, *Deception*, *Winter Meeting*, *June Bride*) have been dialogue pieces, theatrical in tone, and the same is true of *All About Eve*: Mankiewicz, though he began as a writer in 1934, shows that he pays more attention to words than to visual flow.

This, too, is in the great tradition. As creative artists, actors can be the most pure, self-contained and independent of all: not even a pianist or a singer can gain a great reputation if he performs music of generally inferior quality, while an actor can do just that. One can think of half a dozen who fascinated audiences for years in plays of more than dubious quality, and in the cinema Garbo can only be revived in gloriously top-heavy vehicles like *Queen Christina* and *Camille*.

At this point, though, a distinction must be made between the great ones of the theatre and of the cinema. The star system is abused, but it is basically valid. There are some personalities who, through physique, magnetism, and the ability to project emotion at particular intensity, gain a more immediate contact with their audience than do others. The most gifted, the most brilliant, can carry almost anything, and even enjoy the challenge of indifferent material from which they can create something overwhelming. But this technique is basically *theatrical*, and in the cinema it makes the adjustment from a vehicle to a real part in a real film much more difficult. The outstanding stage actress, unless so far lapses in egocentricity that she fears competition even from an author, can switch from *matinée* success to Shakespeare with only a modification in technique. On the screen, "star" acting as such means a physical concentration on the player—what she does, says, how she reacts in close-up, her most effective angles—that can only be at the expense of the medium, the narrative, as a whole. Reduced to the absurd, it is Bernhardt's death-bed scene in the film of *La Dame aux*

*Camélias*: by contrast, the extraordinary quality of Duse in *Cenere* is due not simply to the fact that this actress found the secret of accommodating a larger-than-life stage technique to the camera.

For, in the brief history of film acting, two distinct tendencies can be observed; a movement towards naturalism, progressing as films liberated themselves from the theatre, and another towards the creation of synthetic, static personalities on the star system. Nowadays these opposites exist in the same films—compare the small-part performances of American film players with those of some of the stars they support—or compare even the stars: Spencer Tracy playing opposite Lana Turner, or Henry Fonda acting at Gene Tierney. But while the stars may not be good actors, they are plastic material—camera positioning, lighting, editing, can do wonders for them, incorporate them more firmly in the development of the narrative; they can be used, like *décor*, as dramatic elements for the director to emphasise or subdue. Even the best film actors, brilliant actors in their own right, are partially plastic material, and there is no equivalent in the theatre of the exterior interpretation made possible in films by editing a performance—whereby a close-up can add something principally by virtue of being a close-up, and a switch in mood be obtained from a long shot in which the actor may simply have to stand rather than act. Bernhardt was never plastic material in this sense: she acted at the camera as if it were a set of footlights. Duse was. Garbo was, but she was hardly ever handled by a director of sufficient force and talent, only by experts in constructing vehicles.

The more direct and powerful the impact of a screen personality, naturally, the more difficult it becomes to shape it into a film from which it does not obtrude too much. Fonda, Garfield, Conte, Fredric March, Spencer Tracy, Betty Field, Olivia de Havilland, Barbara Bel Geddes, are examples of highly gifted American players who, by a combination of technique and temperament, adjust themselves intuitively to film narrative. Garbo, Bette Davis,



Hepburn, are virtuosi round whom, without an equally virtuoso director, a film is in danger of stopping dead. Just as stage acting has evolved from the formalism of the *commedia dell'arte* through the barnstorming of the last century to the comparative naturalism of the modern theatre, so screen acting develops creatively alongside the medium itself. The star system, while its commercial standards are often low, and its technical triumphs range from Carol Reed's handling of the 7-year-old Bobby Henrey to other directors' no less miraculous handling of some rather older persons who shall be nameless, is a recognition of the fact that the best screen players are, in a sense, created like everything else in a film. Its weakness results from fitting pictures to stars, rather than the other way round, a practice typical of commerce, which is so often keyed to the demands of the times but in practice apt to lag behind them.

Of the great stars, Bette Davis is a rare example, not only through her gifts, but because she has asserted the value of imagination and technical ability in a profession that can be followed without much of either. Her present supremacy was, perhaps, inevitable if she were to succeed at all. When she first arrived in Hollywood in 1930, after a few years in stock companies and success in a Broadway play, she was not a type to be prefabricated into any existing mould. She demanded, in fact, the creation of a new approach, which the unfortunate results of her first screen test emphasised. ("I was badly dressed for the camera, the lighting was awful . . .") Her first few films were failures; in 1932 she was given a contract by Warner Brothers, then a pioneering company, but of her parts in the first fifteen or so films she made there—*So Big*, an early Wellman film, Curtiz's *Cabin in the Cotton*, and *Ex-Lady*, in which she became officially a "star"—only one, relatively small (*Cabin in the Cotton*) was really rewarding. In most of the others she was cast as a kind of mild sex-menace (fashion artist, career girl, gangster's moll), and she usually presented the spectacle of character struggling against type, and working too hard to establish the fact.

She was to remain under contract to Warners' for more than sixteen years, but her career as an actress was effectively started by David Selznick, then a producer at R.K.O. He had already launched Hepburn in *Bill of Divorcement*, and decided in 1934 to cast Bette Davis as Mildred in the film of Maugham's *Of Human Bondage*. This was to be the first proper revelation of her talents. For the first time a film needed her, and she didn't need a film. The director, John Cromwell, had come to Hollywood from the theatre, and was skilled with actors. *Of Human Bondage*, a conscientious though not inspired adaptation, was angled to give both Bette Davis and Leslie Howard the strongest possible prominence, and indeed allowed them to present the kind of character at which they were later to excel again—for him the nervous, vacillating intellectual, for her the unscrupulous, ambitious, coldly passionate little waitress, developed as a saloon-keeper's wife in *Bordertown*, the alcoholic actress in *Dangerous*, finally reformed in *Jezebel*.

For her siren roles and publicity build-up, her hair had been dyed blonde: before, this had been irrelevant, but as Mildred she used it as she has since used a variety of make-up, with enormous skill and as an imaginative adjunct to the presentation of character. One thing that *Of Human Bondage* made clear was the degree of artifice that, as an actress, she could assimilate. Here she used cheap clothes, dyed hair, a pale make-up that fringed her eyes with black and voluptuously filled out her mouth, as positive appurtenances. Few



Anti-Fascism and Water:  
Bette Davis and Paul Lukas in  
"WATCH ON THE RHINE"

actresses, especially on the screen, have succeeded in doing this, and none has done it more effectively.

For, miraculously, the face had "taken", the full range of mobility, expression, temperament, had broken through the earlier image. She was only 26 when she played Mildred, but her face disclosed the sort of potentialities that actresses usually attain only when they are ten years older. It was youthful, but it had a past; it had an ageless quality that could be stressed in either direction. Seven years later she was to play Regina in *The Little Foxes*—a woman in her early forties—and the year after that the spoilt, nymphomaniac Stanley of *In This our Life*, looking more than ten years younger. The face is not beautiful, but it is mysterious, fascinating, with an extraordinary faculty for being itself and somebody else at the same time—the sort of face Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard* brooded over. In *Winter Meeting*, deliberately haggard, every line emphasised, the hair unbecomingly tightened, it is the face of a nervous spinster: two years later it is the face of Margo Channing, of which most women over forty would be envious.

She does not, of course, confine these effects to her face: the whole figure acts, changes. She padded her hips and thickened her ankles to present the dowdy virgin in the first half of *Now Voyager*; turned herself into an ageing school-mistress with a prim hair style in *The Corn is Green*; in *Mr. Skeffington*, frilly, masked in make-up, she captured perfectly the fluffiness and extravagance of a 20's society woman; and with hair pressed back from her forehead, eyebrows and eyelashes obliterated, mouth thinned to a tight, narrow line, she made a creditable image of Queen Elizabeth. These are achievements of technique and imagination that belong wholly to the cinema, because much of their detail would be lost on the stage. The creation of a stage role demands first of all a sustained grasp of its 2½ or 3 hours action; played in continuity, the outlines of the part emerge first, then are filled out with as much detail as the material can absorb. A film part, built up in fragments often realised out of continuity, can begin with detail which, like the film itself, is assembled gradually into the whole. Even then it can be intensified or dislocated in the editing.

On the screen, of course, an actress' technique is shaped by the kind of film in which she appears, and the directors with





ACTRESS DAVIS: "Write me a play about a nice normal woman who just shoots her husband."

whom she works. A recurrent lesson in the history of the cinema is the extent to which the actor may become plastic material in the hands of the director: the Russians and the Italians have shown notable brilliance in the use of non-professional players, and in modern American films Elia Kazan in particular has used non-professionals with great skill in small parts. Obviously a player like Bette Davis doesn't want to be used in this way. Her pre-eminence in the profession has allowed her increasingly to choose her own roles and colleagues, and one can say that in many of her films the relationship of actor and director is almost reversed. Thus, of the films she has made over the last fifteen years, some have been completely tailored to her demands (in a few cases, too completely): in others, her performance has been a vital but not sole factor of success; in others, the material has not been shaped especially for her, but contains a notable part, which she has taken.

In the first category come *Dangerous* (1935), *Dark Victory* (1939), *The Old Maid* (1939), *The Great Lie* (1941), *Now Voyager* (1942), *Mr. Skeffington* (1944), *Deception* (1946), *A Stolen Life* (1947), *Winter Meeting* (1948), *Payment on Demand* (1951): in the second, her work (1938-41) with William Wyler (*Jezebel*, *The Letter*, *The Little Foxes*), with Huston (*In This our Life*, 1942), with Litvak (*The Sisters*, *All this and Heaven too*), the adaptation of *Watch on the Rhine* (1943), with King Vidor (*Beyond the Forest*, 1949): in the third, her parts in *The Petrified Forest* (1935), *Juarez*, *The Corn is Green*, *Elizabeth and Essex* and *All About Eve*.

On average, her performances in the second category have been on the most consistently high level. The first group of films have all been made by directors—Alfred E. Green, Edmund Goulding, Vincent Sherman, Irving Rapper, Curtis Bernhardt, Bretna Windust—of practically no personal style. They can be distinguished relatively by their technical ability (Bernhardt's being by far the most noticeable), but otherwise their personalities have been completely overshadowed by that of the star. The same is true of most of the leading men—Franchot Tone, George Brent, Paul Henreid, Glenn Ford, Jim Davis, Barry Sullivan—none of whom is among the stronger acting talents of the cinema. Only Claude Rains, in *Mr. Skeffington*, *Deception* and, briefly, *Now Voyager*, has given performances of an interest equal to her own. (He himself believes he has never surpassed his performance in *Deception*.) Most of these films are of traditional

vehicular substance, fascinating not intrinsically but for what has been made of them. The star performance is always virtuoso, and in *Dark Victory*, *The Old Maid* and *Winter Meeting* rather more than that. In the first of these, directed by Goulding, she had real pathos and achieved a beautifully graded effect as a girl who discovers she is going blind. (This is one of her two favourite films.) In *The Old Maid*, an Edith Wharton story, made into a Broadway play from which the film was taken and losing as much in the process as Henry James' *Washington Square* when it became *The Heiress*, she was tender and reposed. The film was again directed, in a pedestrian style, by Goulding.

*Winter Meeting* was a strange drama about a frustrated woman who falls in love with an embittered war hero ten years her junior. Their discovery of each other, with the accent on her nervous unfreezing, is followed by his announcement that he wants to become a priest. The film concludes with a masterly sacrificial scene on the telephone. Censorship, particularly Catholic objections, hamstrung the film, she says, adding that "perhaps we were crazy to try it". She wanted Burt Lancaster for the rugged, bewildered hero, but he was unobtainable; the part was taken by a rather hesitant, inexperienced young actor called Jim Davis. Stagey though the handling (Windust) is, *Winter Meeting* remains the most interesting of this group of films, and certainly enshrines one of her best performances.

Of her work with Wyler, *The Little Foxes* of course provided the best film (Wyler's best film, probably), though she personally considers it inferior to the play, and objected to the luxury of the settings, which negated the original atmosphere of Southern decay. She played Regina with deliberate, rigidly calculated artifice—not making her a "big" figure, but building up a series of disturbing affectations and malicious sallies to the climactic scene. This contains one of her most memorable close-ups: the whole face unnaturally tautened, the mouth pressed down, the eyes dilating, watching her dying husband in the mirror. She says she found the deep focus technique uncongenial, but she adjusted her performance to it, and the film is finely balanced. This was the last production of her partnership with Wyler, which had begun with *Jezebel*—her other favourite film—in which she played a heroine with Scarlett O'Hara affinities who shocked New Orleans' society by appearing at a coming-out ball in a scarlet instead of white dress. (She pleaded for four years with Warners' to give her the film—"who wants to see a film about a girl who wants to wear a red dress?" the executives complained.) Ironically, the ballroom sequence remains the best in a loosely constructed, rather novelettish chronicle.

It was about the time of *Jezebel* that Bette Davis decided she was making too many films; in just over six years she had appeared in more than thirty (one year saw the release of no less than eight); she had had one serious quarrel with Warners about the quality of her roles—since her success in *Of Human Bondage* she had been given only three films of any interest, *Dangerous*, *Bordertown* and *The Petrified Forest*—and felt her career endangered by too many unrewarding parts in indifferent films. After the dispute was settled, she played in only two or three films each year. In 1939, the year after *Jezebel*, she made *Dark Victory*, *The Old Maid* and *Elizabeth and Essex*. There is no doubt that the decision had a noticeable effect on the development of her talent. Though disagreements continued—both *Dark Victory* and *Jezebel* were the result of continual pleading with the studio, and perhaps for this reason remain her favourites—she managed to avoid both the



featureless mediocrity of some of her past films and also the repetition of *femme fatale* parts. Between 1939 and 1945 her range developed more markedly, perhaps, than at any other time in her career: *Of Human Bondage* and *The Petrified Forest* had shown two distinct sides of her talent—in the latter she brought an admirable directness to Sherwood's somewhat unreal waitress-painter—and both these sides were to be explored, extended, enriched. In her one good scene in *Juarez* she brought unexpected intensity to the pathetic madness of the Empress Carlotta, and in *All this and Heaven too*, *The Corn is Green* and, above all, *Watch on the Rhine*, she had a restraint, warmth and softness that gave the lie to those who accused her of possessing a set of clever mannerisms that operated only within a narrow range. She rose, too, to one of her best "bad" characterisations in *In This Our Life*. Though a novelette, its background of a decaying, neurotic Southern family was given some depth by John Huston's treatment, and its incidental comment on anti-negro prejudice (1942) gives it further interest. She looks back on the film as a complete failure, personally and in itself: Huston was out of his element, she considered herself ten years too old for the part, she would rather have played the older sister (Olivia de Havilland's role)—but *In This Our Life*, nonetheless, illuminates sharply both its director and its star. The influence of Huston's personality shows through in the unexpected hardness, the ruthless lack of sympathy, brought to her performance; and, showy though the part is, in this film, as in Herman Shumlin's sober, literal transcription of *Watch on the Rhine* and Litvak's uneasy attempt at a period romance, *All this and Heaven too*, Bette Davis is much more integrated to the film as a whole, a strong contributing factor and not a *raison d'être*, than in some of her later appearances.

She has not since worked with a director of personality equivalent to Huston's—only with a King Vidor regressed from the beautiful simplicity of *Hallelujah!* to a mild form of exhibitionism: *Beyond the Forest* (her last film at Warners) presented her as a hick-town Madame Bovary in an impossibly ill-written and meretriciously directed emotional shocker. In a black wig with long tresses, she had a Charles Addams quality and at times almost caricatured herself. In this, probably her worst performance for a long time, one saw, all the same, how Bette Davis can never be less than an interesting actress (a more discreet performance by a lesser actress would have made the film, in fact, unendurable) and how this extraordinary facility is also a source of danger.

Few actor-managers succeed entirely; there is no reason to expect it. The more intense their own creative approach, the more it tends to exclude other considerations—the real value of material chosen, as opposed to what can be made of it, the total quality of a film. From the time that Warners allowed her a direct hand in the choice and production of her films—beginning in 1947 with *A Stolen Life*—the material Bette Davis has chosen has, on the whole, been less interesting, even if her performances continue to be as vital and successful as ever. She found one of her best recent parts, in fact, by chance. It seems incredible that anyone else could have been considered for *All About Eve*, but in fact another actress was approached first and (foolishly, though in this case the foolishness was welcome) decided not to play it. Her Margo Channing has a fullness and authority that suggests—at certain points, anyway—identification. "Give me a nice normal woman who just shoots her husband", the actress remarks to the playwright, and we remember her own long trail of poison, intrigue, blackmail. . . . At another essential point, though—coming to terms with age—she is not fretful.



A WINTER'S TALE: James Davis, Bette Davis

The playing of Margo Channing itself, and *Winter Meeting*, bears witness of that. But in its delineation of natural egocentricity pulling up again and again just this side of disaster, Mankiewicz's writing is probably true for nearly all great actors.

What would one like to see her do? First of all, perhaps, to experiment with a different kind of director: much of the pleasure derived from *All About Eve* was the even matching of player and material. She had the best part, the best lines, and from this point of view the collaboration with Mankiewicz yielded a great deal. She dominated the film, but never illegitimately—not as she dominated *Deception* or *Payment on Demand*, where she is creating something hardly contained in the original material at all. *All About Eve* is still Mankiewicz's film as much as hers. No doubt she could not submit herself easily to a powerful director, especially one whose approach to actors is in itself dominating—Kazan, for instance, or Wilder (what would she have made of Norma Desmond in *Sunset Boulevard*?) or, again, Huston. Yet a severe exercise of temperament might also inspire a definite extension of talent. Her present supremacy, of course, is due not simply to talent but to personal honesty and determination in working for the parts she wanted to play, in asserting independence of spirit. Now this independence is finally won, the reaction, perhaps, is simply to assert the fact. Her recent choice of films and colleagues suggests this. And, as a mature artist in her own right, she is reluctant to subdue herself to the demands of another artist.

In his book on "Film Acting", Pudovkin draws a comparison, writing of the "inner linkage" between an actor and his part, between "transmutation of self" and "direct manifestation of self". The latter is a quality that lesser actors never go beyond, the former is one to which Bette Davis has always striven and frequently reached. But, Pudovkin continues, the "linkage" does not end here. The final consummation of the actor's task is "not just the satisfaction that comes from the accomplishment of a technical task, but the sense of a solution of the ideological tasks posed by the film as a whole, living, growing, full of content, not only for the spectator, but also for the actor as well". Ideologies apart, this poses the actor's ultimate predicament, his need to draw inspiration from a true adjustment of himself to his material—which, in the cinema, means the film, the film maker, as well as the part. In the cinema, too, few actors find themselves in the position to determine this adjustment by themselves; but if they do it is fairly certain they have reached the most vital turning-point of their careers.



# The Current Cinema

## NO RESTING PLACE

## WHITE CORRIDORS

Reviewed by Gavin Lambert

THESE TWO BRITISH FILMS, poles apart in themselves (though both made by directors who began in documentary), have an important point in common: each seeks to reinvigorate a genre of film-making—in the case of *No Resting Place*, the intimate realistic work shot against natural backgrounds (of which few examples exist in the British cinema), and with *White Corridors*, the execution of a studio-made entertainment film, realised quickly and modestly, but with a style and flair possessed only by two or three highly experienced directors in this country.

*No Resting Place*, the more ambitious experiment, was produced by Colin Lesslie (who adapted Ian Niall's novel in collaboration with Paul Rotha and Michael Orron), and directed by Paul Rotha entirely on location in Ireland. The original Cumberland setting and story has been transposed to follow the adventures of the Kyles, a family of tinkers—nomads, as the preface points out, now accepted by society, but refusing themselves to accept society. The story centres on one brother, Alec, who—when his son is shot in the leg by a vicious landowner—throws a stone at the man and finds he has killed him. With the aid of his brothers, he covers up the crime and, with typically intense illiterate cunning, baffles the police when questioned. But, tipsy from celebrating his wiles at a pub, Alec starts a brawl and attacks a policeman; and he, his wife and young son becomes fugitives. They wander in their cart round the melancholy countryside, occasionally finding work, but are separated when Alec (and his brothers) are caught and sent to prison for their brawl. When Alec comes out, he finds that Mannigan, the policeman, has become fiercely obsessed with tracking him down for the murder of the landowner. Alec and his family take to a ramshackle cottage in the hills, where his wife dies. And, inevitably, Mannigan entraps him and arrests him for murder.

Simple in its essentials though the story is, it does in fact entail a division of emphasis in the whole conception: on the one hand, the portrait of Alec and his family, the re-creation of this sad, primitive, immensely vital community of tinkers—on the other, the study of Mannigan, transformed by impotent suspicion and an undeserved blow on the head from a conscientious civic guard to a man with a bitter, obsessive hatred. He becomes a figure out of proportion to the others, even though his complex is stated in a brief scene, and not analysed.

This is a pity, for the most striking part of *No Resting Place* is its picture of the tinker community, and the director is more at home in his handling of it. Rotha presents these nomads—cheerful, loyal, illiterate, restless yet attached to their birth-place, simple in their pleasures and their poverty—with a kind of dispassionate sympathy; the film has the rhythm of their journeyings, reserving its most effective comments for long shots that frame the three figures on their cart in the bleak, disconsolate landscapes, and for the intimate close scenes between Alec and his wife, which are quiet and touching. There are outstanding points of detail—the sudden enraged cries of the women when they are turned off the land they are working by the squire's angry wife, who answers their protests with a bucket of cold water, the wife's simple gesture of

greeting her husband when he comes out of prison with a present of cigarettes, the boy retrieving his mother's battered alarm clock (which he cannot understand but is fascinated by) when he and his father are turned out of their cottage.

The narrative, particularly in the opening scenes, is rather loosely constructed, but Rotha's direction has the clear sincerity one would expect from the maker of *The World is Rich* and *World of Plenty*, and he is finely aided by the camerawork of Wolfgang Suschitzky, with its austere yet varied compositions, by the intelligent playing of Michael Gough, and the true pathos of Eithne Dunne—and by a host of unfamiliar small part players, many of them drawn from the Abbey theatre, who achieve the kind of natural, fresh authenticity one associates with the best modern Italian films.

In method—use of natural settings (none of the film was made in a studio, and the technical difficulties of location shooting are impressively overcome) and unknown actors—and in its human sympathies—its presentation of the poor and dispossessed—*No Resting Place*, indeed, derives inspiration from the work of Italian realist directors. What it lacks is their intensity; while the pictorial detail is often vivid, a stiffness can be detected in the approach to emotional situations. Undeniably, though, it signals a real departure in British film-making as well as a bold personal experiment on the part of producer and director, neither of which, one hopes, will be without effect.

By contrast, *White Corridors* starts with material that is basically synthetic, but through the narrative refinements and studio polish that its director, Pat Jackson, brings to it, achieves a persuasive surface reality. Adapted by Jan Read and the director from a novel by Helen Ashton, the film covers various episodes and lives at a Midlands hospital during a few days; in the foreground is the relationship of Dr. Marriner, a research pathologist working on a new serum, and Dr. Sophie Dean, a young surgeon, and the case of Tommy Briggs, brought to the hospital with mild blood-poisoning that fails to respond to treatment and eventually causes his death; in the background, a cross-section of characters—an irresponsible young house surgeon who philanders with a nurse and nearly causes the death of a patient through negligence, his shocked father, who breaks down in the middle of an operation, the probation nurse who is horrified at her first sight of a mutilated face, a dilatory board of governors, Tommy Briggs' mother, a civil servant returned from abroad and unable to comprehend the Health Service (too caricatured). Characters and motives are not explored with much depth, and the episodic structure accentuates this, yet Pat Jackson transforms the familiar into the unfamiliar by his sustained invention and effective control over the players.

There are several excellent performances—notably James Donald's withdrawn, moody Dr. Marriner, the spontaneous Tommy Briggs of Brand Inglis, the quiet feeling of Megs Jenkins as his mother—and the light realism of the treatment is cleverly adjusted to this kind of story, where few scenes are sustained for long without interruption, and a quick eye for detail and dramatic effect is essential to establish the various threads of tension.





"No Resting Place": Alec comes out of prison. Michael Gough, Eithne Dunne and Christy Lawrence.



"White Corridors". Dr. Marriner describes his work to an interested but uncomprehending board of governors. Fabia Drake, James Donald, Philip Stainton, Henry Edwards and (behind) Barry Jones as Dr. Shoesmith.

This is only Pat Jackson's second feature film since *Western Approaches*—a contract took him to Hollywood, where he was assigned only to one routine melodrama, *Shadow on the Wall*. But, though this experience may have been frustrating, it has also been valuable, for Pat Jackson has shown in *White Corridors* a rare professionalism. He has succeeded in making a superior entertainment picture that can, technically, compare with Hollywood—and with this facility (and a box-office success) behind him, should be able to extend his promise on material wholly equal to it.

## STRANGERS ON A TRAIN

*Reviewed by Richard Winnington*

WHEN, NEARLY TEN YEARS ago, Alfred Hitchcock broke away from his Daphne du Maurier phase with *Shadow of a Doubt*, there were premature congratulations. He was first in with the real location melodrama, and it looked as if he might have returned to his older and more entertaining style. The succeeding Hitchcock films, popular, adept and replete with useless trick effects, have been, however, peculiarly depressing in that their hollowness has derived from Hitchcock himself, and not—as in the cases of some other expatriate directors—from Hollywood. Hitchcock, one has felt, no longer believes there's much point in making films, and satisfies a jaded urge mainly in the setting up and surmounting of pointless technical obstacles. To a whole generation, unacquainted with most of his work in the *Blackmail—The Lady Vanishes* period, Hitchcock's reputation must have seemed inflated.

His new film, *Strangers on a Train* (Warner), to some extent restores the situation and recalls the old virtuoso of the art of suspense. Here again fear and paranoia are let loose in the open against normal backgrounds, and the tension mounts and writhes through ordinary humdrum human activity to its bizarre, sensational climax. The story, adapted from Patricia Highsmith's novel by Raymond Chandler and Czenzi Ormonde, is an intriguing one.

It opens juicily with the apparently chance encounter between two young men, strangers, in the saloon of a Washington-New York express. One of them, Bruno Anthony,

a playboy type (who has, it turns out, contrived the meeting), lays a harebrained proposition before the other, Guy Haines (Farley Granger), a popular tennis star. Banteringly, but with an underlying air of deadly seriousness, he suggests a murder pact. The inconvenient and unpleasant wife of Haines, who refuses to release him to marry a Senator's daughter, is to be murdered by Anthony. In return, Haines is to dispose of the equally inconvenient father who stands between Anthony and the full expression of his personality. The absence of motive—there being no link between the executor and the victim—will guarantee two perfect and useful murders.

Sensing madness, the half-amused, half-horrified Haines escapes from his embarrassing companion, leaving his cigarette lighter behind in the confusion, and proceeds to an abortive meeting with his wife, a small-time slut admirably portrayed by Laura Elliot. A violent quarrel, during which he threatens her, is overheard by witnesses. The scene is now laid for a murder in the grand Hitchcock manner. The paranoiac Anthony, following Mrs. Haines that night on a jaunt through the fairground Tunnel of Love, catches up with her on an ornamental island and neatly throttles her. Ingenuity is stretched to the limit when the murder is seen as a reflection in a lens of the victim's fallen spectacles. With these in his hand, Anthony then confronts the horrified Haines, demanding fulfilment of the rest of the bargain.

The film begins to sag when Haines fails to develop as a plausible character. Vacillating and cowardly before the blackmailing threats of Anthony (which an ounce of normal courage or acumen could have demolished), he makes un-



"Strangers on a Train": Bruno suggests the murder pact. Farley Granger, Robert Walker





successful play for sympathy as a hero. The bad casting of Farley Granger is not the only lapse; the tempo has diminished and the flaws of logic obtrude. And the sequences through which Anthony stalks and badgers Haines (Robert Walker gives a polished and chilling performance throughout the film), are further slowed down by dull interplay between Haines and the suspicious Senator's daughter. One scene produces some of Hollywood's greenest psychiatric corn. Anthony, an uninvited guest at the Senator's socialite reception, is thrown into a psychotic trauma by the chance resemblance of the Senator's younger daughter (Patricia Hitchcock) to the late Mrs. Haines, and half-strangles a playful dowager. This strange behaviour is looked on by the company as no more than harmless eccentricity, and he is politely asked to leave.

In contrast, Anthony's home background is evoked with a malignant skill that bears out the hand of Raymond Chandler in the script. The atmosphere of overheated, opulent decay is typical. There is real horror in the scene where the Senator's daughter (colourlessly played by Ruth Roman) confronts Anthony's doting mother (a brilliant performance by Marion Lorne) at her easel with proof of his criminal lunacy, and encounters a bemused, apathetic and immune old woman, as crazy as her son.

The action finally resolves into a race against time. Now thoroughly out of control, Anthony is rushing to plant the lighter at the scene of the murder; Haines must win a tough championship game before catching the only train that will enable him to intercept Anthony. This is pure Hitchcock sleight-of-hand, but pretty to watch. Anthony's feverish attempts to recover the lighter he has dropped down a drain are brilliantly cross-cut into the magnificently photographed tennis match.

The climactic life-and-death struggle on the madly accelerated roundabout comes, however, like an expected blow on the side of the head from a blunt instrument. A lot of murderers have had their final run across a lot of parapets, along a lot of sewers, up a lot of ladders, down a lot of tunnels and in and out of a lot of funfairs since Hitchcock started it all up.

*Strangers on a Train* confirms Hitchcock's utter dependence on his script—in this case the best he has had for years—and a basic superficiality which prevents him from developing the psychological conflicts his characters do no more than suggest. His power of observation and his flair for surprise, counterpoising of the realistic against the bizarre, are still in evidence, but beyond a wider (and effective) use of close-ups he makes no innovations or advances. But in spite of its many and obvious lapses the film will certainly be classed as one of the successes of the year. And rightly.

## MACBETH

*Reviewed by Philip Hope-Wallace*

"... let us meet

*And question this most bloody piece of work."*

Macbeth 2. III.

ORSON WELLES APPEARS first on horseback looking like a fugitive from *Alexander Nevsky* and ends in an *outré* costume which makes him look like the Statue of Liberty. The look of the thing, which is after all the most important part

*Hitchcock anatomises a murder: the fairground scene in "Strangers on a Train". The last shot is seen through a lens of the victim's spectacles, fallen to the ground. Robert Walker, Laura Elliot.*



of a film, is seldom felicitous. Macbeth's castle has even less geography than Hamlet's film Elsinore; it looks all too often like a rain-soaked scenic railway at a fun fair, a castle hewn from papier mâché rocks, but Welles is not the first producer of the play to have difficulty with the period. A vague impression of Wagnerian timelessness sits on the costumes. Few of the voices have an American tinge and it would not matter if they had; a sort of plausible Scots burr is generally aimed at.

What of the text there is remains unaltered, for the greater part, and it is spoken slowly, not to say funereally, either as dialogue or as soliloquy, dubbed over anguished, tight-lipped close-ups of the "speaker"; this can be effective, as it has been in Olivier's Shakespeare films, but meets with the usual difficulty: *i.e.* that we are forced to look, to watch, when all we ought, or need, to do is to listen. In other words where Shakespeare uses his unmatched power of evoking the mood, the thought, the scene *by word alone*, the camera feels itself to be a shy and otiose interloper. Sometimes a soliloquy can be decorated with images impressive from a purely cinematic point of view—as when Macbeth shouts wildly for Seyton (the dwarf George Chirello) and we see his shadow dangling from the bell rope, a suicide's corpse. Welles, fine film maker, is not unaware of the camera's power to add a visual counterpoint undreamt by Shakespeare. At other times, a soliloquy is turned into dialogue, more questionably as when Banquo is made to deliver "Thou hast it now, King, Cawdor, Glamis, all" not to himself but as a taunt flung at his former buddy.

The Lady Macbeth (Jeanette Nolan) having done her earlier scenes much as most Lady Macbeths of something less than genius are apt to do them, sleepwalks all over the scenic railway, ending up in her husband's arms, and then takes a flying death-leap from the battlements. And there are other episodes which may surprise scholars, such as Macbeth's personal supervision of the slaughter in the Macduff home. Banquo is murdered by felons dropping on him from a tree, the classic death of a Western District Attorney.

Nevertheless parts of the great poetic drama come over well; the "English scene", for instance; and in the supernatural episodes and the famous theatrical horror of the banquet, imaginative camerawork and cutting pull off some powerful effects. The witches in the swirling ground-fog, with their voices echoing in the air and their cloaks receding into the murk, tighten the scalp; the dagger of the mind and the horrid image of the dead Banquo shock, as they do not always shock upon the stage. In such episodes we have an earnest of what Welles was trying for and in part has succeeded in doing. On the other hand, imagination is checked where we are shown too literally what in the play is only brought to us as a frightening rumour; *e.g.* Birnam Wood moving upon Dunsinane. The appalling difficulties of trying to recreate a masterpiece of one sort of medium (the stage of the Globe) in terms of another, so utterly different, have not been ignored or solved. Those who are interested in the problem will find much to discuss; and those who come ignorant of Shakespeare to the cinema will probably receive an impression of portentous dismay, which is, after all, something. The attempt should not be written off as a failure, though one cannot help thinking that a more powerful effect might have been achieved if the film, properly, had been silent; simply a series of blood-curdling illustrations to a series of anonymous declamations from the sound track.



Orson Welles as Macbeth

## THE SOUND OF FURY

*Reviewed by James Morgan*

THE AMERICAN CINEMA continues its powerful exploration of a contemporary underworld with this new and highly interesting production by Robert Stillman, formerly associated with Stanley Kramer; although its climax is the hysterical savagery of a lynching mob in a small Californian town, unleashed by the sensation-mongering of a local newspaper, it moves throughout on several levels. Firstly, the victims of the mob are guilty criminals—one, Slocum, a brash, bullying hoodlum, the other his weak, reluctant accomplice, a man who had moved west with his family to find work but, in the despair of unemployment, drifted into crime. Only when the hoodlum essays a kidnapping and, in a pathological outbreak, murders the victim with senseless brutality, does Howard realise the appalling extent of Slocum's depravity. He finally confesses after being taken on a nightclub jag, a brilliantly realised sequence in which Slocum's lascivious pawing of a large blonde is contrasted with the timid advances of a pathetic, ageing little manicurist to the stunned, almost oblivious Howard. Thus, at one end of the scale, *The Sound of Fury* encompasses violence, mob fury, the brutality of crime; and, at the other, strikes irony and compassion in the scenes of Howard's degradation and his final, tormented sense of guilt. Far from entering a sentimental plea for Howard, in fact, it stresses that the more innocent, regenerate man is the one who struggles with an overwhelming realisation of his guilt. Effectively interwoven with these elements is the figure of the journalist, who understands too late the irresponsibility of his articles, after—in another grippingly handled sequence—the townspeople storm the jail, beat up the screaming, terrified Slocum and the resigned, indifferent Howard, and hang them in the square.

(continued on page 28)

More Film Reviews, including "Four in a Jeep", "The Lavender Hill Mob" and "On the Riviera" on pages 28, 29



# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A FILM



## PHOTOGRAPHED BY



*The Secret People*, which Thorold Dickinson recently completed at Ealing Studios, is a British film with an international flavour: the leading parts are played by two outstanding European stars, Valentina Cortesa and Serge Reggiani, and the story is of underground intrigue by political exiles in London before the war. Maria, a refugee from a fascist country, meets again on holiday in Paris a young man she has known since childhood, a revolutionary friend of her dead father, now plotting against the dictator of his country. Re-crossing, their lives become bound up with each other, but overshadowed by the realities of fanaticism and violence.

The script was written by Thorold Dickinson and Wolfgang Wilhelm (with acknowledgements to Joyce Cary): the film is produced by Sidney Cole, photographed by Gordon Dines, and other players include Audrey Hepburn, as Maria's younger sister, Charles Goldner as her uncle, a Soho café-owner, Megs Jenkins, Geoffrey Hibbert and Irene Worth.

This day's shooting was concerned mainly with the scene of Maria and Louis meeting again at the Paris Exhibition of 1937. The large set was an impressive replica, designed by the art director William Kellner, and crowded with extras representing foreign visitors from many countries. During a crowd disturbance, Maria suddenly feels a hand on her arm; she turns to protest, and looks into the face of Louis.

Above: the meeting of Maria and Louis. Valentina Cortesa and Serge Reggiani in rehearsal. On the left: a director at work. Thorold Dickinson in thought and action. Charles Goldner is the actor in the centre still



Thorold Dickinson *directs*  
Valentina Cortesa *and* Serge Reggiani  
*in*  
"Secret People"



## DANIEL FARSON

Valentina Cortesa charmed at her first (to this country) appearance in a fairly wretched little Italian comedy, *Un Americano in Vacanza*; it is a pity that *La Nuit Porte Conseil*, Marcel Pagliero's whimsical, Clair-ish fantasy in which she played delightfully opposite de Sica, has not been shown here. In Hollywood she has not been fortunate; none of her parts—in *Thieves' Highway*, *East of the Rising Sun*, *The House on Telegraph Hill*—did justice to her talents. But the recent release of a film for which she returned to Italy last year, *Donne Senza Nome* (*Unwanted Women*) served to remind us of her unique gifts for delicacy and pathos. *The Secret People* is undoubtedly the first worthy English-speaking role she has been given.

Small, intent, restless, her vividness in front of the camera begins with a wonderfully expressive face that radiates sensibility and quick emotional response. Oddly enough, whereas with Reggiani one has the feeling that personality is transferred directly to performance, this process seems with Valentina Cortesa a kind of ecstatic fulfilment. Off-set, the personality is visibly adjusting itself to a different tempo, varying swiftly in mood, exploding into little bursts of humour or withdrawal—difficult to contain. In this way she conforms to the classic "actress", that great line of mysterious temperaments (Garbo being the prime example in the cinema)



Above: Reggiani before the camera, for a close shot of the scene of meeting, opposite. On the right: Valentina Cortesa on and off the set. At the top, preparing for a take. Below, in conversation (the subject is Hollywood)





Reggiani in another moment of the scene shown on the preceding page

which are somehow elusive and impossible to analyse.

Serge Reggiani is a taut and highly intelligent actor: he has been seen here in several French films, including *Les Portes de la Nuit*, *Les Amants de Vérone*, *Manon*, *Retour à la Vie* and *La Ronde*. In all of them his drive and personality have created notable characterisations. The firmness of these performances—ranging from a romantic lead to a Parisian wide boy, from a simple soldier to a complex study of a hysterical collaborator—might lead one to expect an actor of complete outward assurance; but what looks on the screen the natural result of technique, instinct and personal strength, is in effect the outcome of intense nervous concentration. In this case, *The Secret People* is Reggiani's first film in a foreign language, and the part calls for an additional effort. But on the set, his ability to control a sensitive and exacting temperament—rare quality in an actor—is always evident.

Although no actor ever seems the same person on and off the screen, Reggiani preserves the continuity in two essentials:

Adjusting make-up before a take



directness and vitality. One might add that he would be brilliant in comedy—both *Manon* and *La Ronde* allowed him humour, but not to the extent of which he is capable—and that in fact an early stage of his career was appearing in Agnès Capri's cabaret, an approximate French equivalent to the Players' Theatre; that he has a great admiration for Jacques Prévert (but *not* for Cocteau); that he would like to direct a film of Camus' *L'Etranger*; and that he has genuinely enjoyed working in England, and hopes to return.

A director who has made fewer films than his contemporaries, Thorold Dickinson also gives us more surprises than many of them. Since his first, *The Dark Command*, in 1937, he has made only seven films: in 1940 *Gaslight* showed a supple, fluent narrative skill and fastidious period detail that at once established an individual figure: *Next of Kin* was a topical subject, that in spite of script crudities necessitated probably by the demands of propaganda, and one or two weak actors, was grippingly handled, authentically set, and culminated in a battle staged with much vigour and precision. In *Queen of Spades* he took over a film completely scripted and cast at short notice, and made of it something completely his own—



Reggiani, Valentina Cortesa, Thorold Dickinson, Charles Goldner. Simultaneous but separate preparations

the immersion in period and masterly control of camerawork reminded one of *Gaslight*, but the material was less austere, the settings richer, the texture more varied, and the film had plastic qualities and dramatic imagery unrivalled in the contemporary British cinema. With *The Secret People* he returns to a modern story, with strong overtones of melodrama, at the studio where he made *Next of Kin*.

The fact that this elaborate, often complex style exists side by side with the knack of working quickly and efficiently is the mark of a sure craftsman, authoritative with his material and his schedule. And the combination of highly polished technique, decorative flair, with a taste for melodrama—his best films have all contained elements, greater or lesser, of this—defines an original creative personality. Now, surprisingly but characteristically, he would like to make a comedy.



# THE PLAYER AND THE PART



A sidelight on the self-transformation of actors is provided by these two photographs. Above, Serge Reggiani and Valentina Cortesa arrive for *Secret People* location work in West Street, Cambridge Circus, London; left, in a scene from the film, they become Louis and Maria.





Escaped prisoner: Viveca Lindfors, Ralph Meeker, Dinan and in "Four in a Jeep"

(THE SOUND OF FURY, continued from page 23)

All the more surprising, then, that the script, adapted by Joe Pagano from his own novel "The Condemned", finds necessary to introduce an Italian doctor (friend of the journalist's) who has no real place in the story but utters tiresome platitudes in a broken accent about the necessity for reason to triumph over emotionalism; for the situations themselves are rich enough to contain all the implications, and these corny declamations are both incongruous and unworthy. Maybe in the novel the doctor was a more important figure, justified by the action, or maybe he has been mistakenly introduced as a soap-box for the box-office. At any rate, his presence reduces *The Sound of Fury* to a near-failure as a dramatic whole, though its best sequences are superior to many other films on related subjects, including *The Dividing Line*, *Storm Warning* and *Ace in the Hole*.

The director, Cyril Endfield, has made only one previous film—*The Underworld Story*, a routine melodrama with some interesting minor characters and also partly concerned with sensational journalism; he is an accomplished craftsman, the film is well paced, tightly developed, and full of telling incidental detail. The acting—especially Katherine Locke as the manicurist, Lloyd Bridges (though he overplays and imitates Kirk Douglas once or twice) as Slocum, and Frank Lovejoy as Howard—is excellent.

## FOUR IN A JEEP

*Reviewed by Catherine de la Roche*

A SINCERE ATTEMPT to further international understanding. *Four in a Jeep* is remarkable for its fairness and accuracy in portraying people of different nationalities, but partly defeats its own ends by evading fundamental issues. Though, all in all, it says little on a great theme, its tremendous cinematic eloquence makes it memorable.

Everything included in the film is plausible: the characters, incidents, backgrounds, even the sequence of cause and effect. Like *The Last Chance* by the same director, Leopold Lindtberg, it is multilingual, and so skilfully has the scenarist Richard Schweizer devised situations where English is naturally spoken most, that the English version needs no subtitles. The plot is built round an episode typical enough

of Vienna under four-power control. In a fit of despair, an Austrian prisoner of war escapes from a Soviet transit camp nearby, not knowing that he was due for release. Dreading disproportionately serious consequences, his wife secretly arranges to locate and transfer him from the Soviet sector of Vienna to the American and, in the process, becomes involved with a four-power military police patrol, which is immediately ordered not to interfere in the case. The Soviet authorities, who had not at first attached much importance to it, become suspicious when the American and French sergeants persist in helping the Austrian couple, and intensify their search. This creates a particularly hard dilemma for the Russian sergeant, who, while disagreeing radically with his Western colleagues about insubordination, however noble the motives, sympathises with the fugitives and eventually helps them too. Finally, by tacit agreement between the four in the Jeep, they make a getaway, but not before the conflict and misunderstandings between the Russian and the other three culminate in a fight during which the American draws his revolver on the Russian.

Thus, excessive fear of the Russians causes the Western characters to band together in defiance; this in turn makes the Russians increase their security measures, which leads to a fight that neither side wins or loses—a chain of reactions that is not only credible, but symbolic. But what of the solution, the means to the Happy End, which consists of disobeying orders, and the end itself, which implies that salvation lies in escape from the Russians? In view of this the Soviet delegation's protest at Cannes is understandable, though their contention that the Russian sergeant is unsympathetically portrayed is not.

Disciplined, loyal and compassionate, he is the strongest character of them all, and his scene in the taxi with the fugitive's wife, who thinks he has arrested her, when in fact, against his conscience and with a sadly humorous realisation of the incongruous situation, he is taking her back to her hiding-place, is one of the finest. The French sergeant, full of the *savoir-faire* and sympathetic discretion which the American, with his sense of mission and impetuous sentimentality, lacks, and even the cheery, obliging Cockney, who, however, has the least to do, are quite characteristic, and so are their relationships, especially the exasperated, uncomprehending hostility between the American and Russian.

But they are over-simplified, and their differences and affinities are superficial. No doubt it would be hard to concentrate within the space of a screenplay the fundamental traits of four nationalities—in his longer stage play *The Love of Four Colonels* Peter Ustinov attempts this in his tolerant, playfully ironical manner, getting little further. More likely the real issues were ignored because of the political controversies inherent in them, and the film's serious purpose is thus undermined. For a picture of this kind could only become fully effective if it juxtaposed national attitudes, such as the British, on one hand, whose traditions stem from habeas corpus, a conception of justice independent of Roman law—everything, in short, behind the idea that respect for the individual makes for respect for the community—and the Soviet attitude on the other hand, which is as firmly based on the belief that only the welfare of the community makes for the welfare of the individual (which in a case such as described in this film, can put even a minor suspect in a pretty bad spot). Such a juxtaposition would reveal not only the much publicised contrasts, but also the less familiar, genuine and infinitely important affinities between nations in their convictions and aspirations. *Four in a Jeep* fails to do this, and



its plea for humanity in international affairs therefore has a rather futile ring. But its own tolerance, the brilliant acting by Viveca Lindfors as the wife, Yoseph Yadin as the Russian sergeant and, indeed, the entire cast, make it an immensely moving picture.

## THE LAVENDER HILL MOB

*Reviewed by Gavin Lambert*

THE INGENIOUS STARTING-POINT of T. E. B. Clarke's script of *The Lavender Hill Mob* (Ealing Studios) provides some episodes of original and diverting comedy, and allows Alec Guinness and Stanley Holloway to develop two characterisations in lively contrast—the timid, sly, mousy, secretly ruthless Bank of England employee, and his florid, overwrought associate, a manufacturer of unpleasing souvenir objects, who emits like them an aroma of genteel decay. Their plot for smuggling gold bullion to France in models of the Eiffel Tower, and their discovery of two professional accomplices (Alfie Bass and Sidney James), are engagingly described; the characters are set in an ordinary suburbia from which other eccentrics also obtrude, notably a refined old lady with an insatiable appetite for American shockers (well played by Marjorie Fielding): in these scenes, invention is at its best, and T. E. B. Clarke's gift for combining the normal and familiar with wild fantasy functions more richly and successfully, perhaps, than it has done since *Hue and Cry*.



*The Lavender Hill Mob*—Sidney James, Stanley Holloway, Alec Guinness—drawn by Richard Winnington.

During the second half of the film the writer's facility for mechanical contrivance runs away with him, in a series of over-gagged scenes; and Charles Crichton's direction strains too much for farce. Fortunately, the original impetus is strong, and the fresh comic conception of these two nervous mobsters, forced into situations of wild impropriety when their cunning misfires, pleasurably remains. Modest

though its intentions are, the entertainment keeps a flavour distinctly its own, and Guinness's Holland and Holloway's Pendlebury, victims at last of the laws of a fantasy world they themselves have so tenaciously created, dreamers of endearing dreams that a party of nitwitted schoolgirls so rudely disturbs, will not be forgotten.

## ON THE RIVIERA

*Reviewed by Frank Hauser*

IT IS CLEAR THAT entertainers like Danny Kaye and Carmen Miranda, who made their reputations in cabaret and satisfy a somewhat specialised taste, are not easy to fit into routine Hollywood patterns. All the same, there is no excuse for such a blatant waste of talent as *On the Riviera*. The idea seems to have been that since Danny Kaye does a passable imitation of Chevalier, he might well take over an old Chevalier film. The plot, calling for a double role, allows Kaye to display his French accent and look like Errol Flynn for half the time, while displaying a somewhat subdued version of his normal self for the rest. It is, like *That Night in Rio*, a plot which allows many laughable misunderstandings, for A impersonates B and thinks he is deceiving B's wife, who however is in the secret and is all the more amused when B returns to take over and makes love to her in the character of A impersonating B to which she responds knowing full well it is her husband though he later pretends that it was A all the time thus throwing her into confusion which is only resolved when—but what's the use? Even the official synopsis gets the story wrong, and its eternal double-backing frets the mind as badly as receiving two stations at once on the radio.

The desperation of plot is more than matched by the staleness of the situations and dialogue. Apart from one conversation which William Wycherly did better in *The Country Wife*, the film has few pretensions to humour. Kaye as a monocled French aviator is sombre and ill at ease; as the night club entertainer he is wretchedly served by his wife in the matter of songs. Only once, in a number called *Papa the Puppet*, does the film come alive: there, in his full wash of charm and simplicity, Kaye's enormous talent shows itself. For the rest he is mostly concerned with negotiating the stairs which litter his many dance routines.

None of the Danny Kaye films has been successful, as the early Astaire-Rogers films were successful. The reason, it seems to me, is that Danny Kaye is not a star of the cinema in the way that Bob Hope, for example, is (or was). He is an entertainer, whose personality is incapable of holding one's interest unaided for ninety minutes. These stereotyped musicals show him trying too hard for laughs, with an inadequate comedy technique. The turns are another matter, of course: when the numbers are good he displays a virtuosity and comic genius without parallel to-day. But the gaps in between leave him stranded—he ought, one feels, to be playing a supporting part, as Astaire in effect did in the early days, when his every appearance would have its impact. However, there is little likelihood of that happening; and short of coming under the control of a really good comedy director like Preston Sturges, it is difficult to avoid the feeling that in ten years Danny Kaye, like Carmen Miranda before him, will be played out: not a vital artist any more, but an imitator of his imitators.



## SCRIPTING :

### *The Return of Hecht*

Penelope Houston

THE LIFTING OF the Exhibitors' ban on films written by Ben Hecht has recently brought us two on which he worked a year or so ago for Fox. For British audiences, the explosive name is still omitted from the credits of these films—*Whirlpool* and *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. Both are indifferent thrillers, although the former is rather more fun, thanks to a preposterous plot involving a psychiatrist, his kleptomaniac wife, and a suave astrologer-hypnotist who puts the kleptomaniac into a trance and despatches her to be arrested for a murder he has committed. This villain is given some dialogue which occasionally sounds like a rather good imitation of the authentic Hecht manner.

These films lead one to consider Hecht's career, from the brilliance of *The Front Page* in 1931 to the confecting of foolish thrillers in 1951. Hecht came to Hollywood in 1930 from journalism and play-writing; he and Charles MacArthur adapted for the screen their play *The Front Page* and, a few years later, *20th Century*. These films were in a sense prototypes; they were models of the typical Hollywood comedy writing of the 'thirties. The chief characters were disillusioned, scoop-hunting journalists, domineering editors, grandiose actors. The world was not that of real life, but a feverish, speeded-up approximation to it; dialogue seldom became conversation, but usually consisted of characters pursuing their own line of thought, interrupting each other in vain efforts to make themselves understood; it was dialogue which demanded speaking at the top of the voice. A character was sketched in by a few mannerisms, or by an *idée fixe* which he attempted to bring to the notice of other people. It was comedy of situation, expressed through dialogue, and its speed made it genuinely cinematic. Finally, it was essentially comedy of the cities, in which any excursion outside the city was itself material for humour.

At the end of the 'thirties Hecht wrote *Nothing Sacred*, one of the few of the crazy-sophisticated cycle which survives re-seeing. This story of the girl, believed to be dying of an obscure poison, who is brought to New York, given the slobbering sympathy of the city, and, unmasked, left to slip off with the journalist while New York sobs over her suicide note and organizes a state funeral, is often called a satire. But for true satire it is both too crude and too unrealistic. Here are the type-characters: the bullying editor, the young journalist on the verge of dismissal, the crazy but charming heroine. It is the familiar artificial world, provided with a stronger story-situation and plot development and some extremely clever dialogue, played with such speed that it takes on the quality of action. The formula is little different in *His Girl Friday* for which Hecht wrote the original story, reviving the name of the hero of *The Front Page* (Hildy Johnson) for the heroine.

But there was another side to Hecht. He and MacArthur, asserting their independence of Hollywood, re-opened in the middle 'thirties a deserted studio on Long Island and went into production. They made a thriller, *Crime Without Passion*, which was well spoken of, and they produced the curiosity

*The Scoundrel*. This, the story of a wicked man who died but was given one month's grace to find someone who wept for him, was a static and stagey affair with dialogue consisting of a string of tired and over-blown epigrams. That this was not merely a strange accident was shown by *Spectre of the Rose*, made much later for Republic, and produced, written and directed by Hecht. This was the story of a girl ballet dancer who married a male dancer who, unfortunately, was liable to run wild with a knife whenever he danced the ballet of the title. An exceptionally tiresome old ballet teacher, La Sylph, tried to protect the girl without denouncing the boy, but the inevitable denouement was the mad dancer's leap from a skyscraper window. The writing was a curiously inept mixture of sentiment and cynicism; the plot was poorly constructed; there was much pretentious and unlikely talk about art. The worst excesses of the dialogue were given to a poet (Lionel Stander), who told the girl that "your body is an exclamation point after the word beauty", and called an impresario "a faded carnation in the button-hole of Broadway". The sentimental-cynic, turning up also in the part played by Thomas Mitchell in *Angels over Broadway*, is unfortunately a favourite Hecht character: ideas of an almost embarrassing triteness are given to him, wrapped in dialogue of an almost embarrassing pretentiousness.

A third line, to which Hecht seems to have turned increasingly, is thriller writing. He wrote, incidentally, the original story of *Scarface*. He is not, however, a natural thriller writer; there is too much talk, too little action, and too many psychiatrists, hypnotists and the like. *Spellbound*, which was one of the two he wrote for Hitchcock, is perhaps the best. The plot here was highly artificial, a woman psychiatrist falling in love with an amnesiac who might also be a murderer, and joining him in flight. To keep tension alive Hecht used the most unscrupulous tricks—ably realized by Hitchcock—to suggest to the nerves what the mind would never believe: that the hero might be a murderer. These effects showed Hecht as a clever technician; a tactical writer, it might be said, who lacks the strategic sense to construct a thriller as an effective whole, but is expert in detail.

Hecht has tried his hand at many types of screen writing including, strangely enough, the adaptation of *Wuthering Heights*; he produced a capable transcription, but could not convey the novel's emotional force or insight into character. Hecht, one feels, seldom really likes or sympathises with his characters, and perhaps for this reason he tends to be indifferent to motive, actions being taken arbitrarily to set a plot in motion rather than from any compulsion within the character.

This is a weakness, but it did not seem one in his best comedies, written with or without MacArthur. This type of comedy, however, has run its course in the cinema, and perhaps Hecht has lost his own taste for it. It was a style of artificial humour which reflected the atmosphere of the 'twenties rather than the 'thirties, and the war finally destroyed it. Hecht's own eccentric personal type of film, such as *The Scoundrel*, is still further from reality, and more badly dated. He seems to be left, devoid of reserves, in a mental climate which has rejected one style of comedy without as yet evolving a new one. It is the reverse of the career of Billy Wilder, who has passed from artificial comedy to increasingly acute realistic observation. Hecht may be able to find no way out of the cul-de-sac into which he seems to have run. *Love Happy*, which he wrote for the Marx Brothers, may provide a clue, and should at least show us the comic writer again in action.



# SILENT FILM COMEDY

Siegfried Kracauer

SILENT FILM COMEDY, which reached its apogee in America during the 'twenties, originated in France where its essential traits were developed long before World War I. At a time when the art of story-telling was still unknown—D. W. Griffith had not yet entered upon the scene—this genre had attained near perfection. It was rooted in the traditions of the music hall, the circus, the burlesque and the fair, spectacles drawing in varying degrees on the eternal fascination which catastrophe, dangers and physical shocks exert on civilised man. From its outset film comedy piled up these kinds of thrills in ever new combinations, with the understanding, of course, that at the very last minute the characters involved would manage to escape to safety. The purpose was fun after all. A boy tampering with a garden hose inundates the apartments of a nearby house; people on a pleasure stroll fall smack into the lake; itch powder in the fish does things to the dinner guests; a bride who gets stuck somewhere appears at the wedding party in her underwear—such gags were common in France between 1905 and 1910. Some motifs migrated to America and there became institutions. For instance, the gendarmes, standing figures of the early French farce, re-emerged as the Keystone cops and, surviving the Sennett era, continued to the last to play their double role as the pompous pursuers and the chickenhearted pursued, the former mainly for the purpose of collapsing all the more drastically. There is no short Chaplin comedy in which the Tramp would not alternately dread and outwit some bulky policeman—the mouse playing with the cat. Crumbling pillars of order, these gendarmes or cops were visibly intended to deepen the impression of a topsy-turvy world. Similarly, the nightmarish motif of being stripped of one's clothes in the presence of normally dressed people threaded slapstick from beginning to end; Harold Lloyd losing his pants was just another version of the bride in her underwear.

Film comedy evoked material life at its crudest. And since in those archaic days of the immobile camera life on the screen was synonymous with life in motion, the comedy makers did their utmost to exaggerate all natural movements. With the aid of a single camera trick they set humanity racing and revelled in games of speed. In *Onesime Horloger* (1908), a very charming French one-reeler, Paris runs wild, the Avenue de l'Opéra turns into an agitated ant heap, and wallpaper flies onto walls that have mushroomed a second before. It was cinema; it was fun; it was as if you sat in a roller coaster driving ahead at full blast, with your stomach all upside down. The dizziness happily added to the shock effects from disasters and seeming collisions. To frame these space-devouring adventures, the chase offered itself as an invaluable pretext. Gendarmes chased a dog who eventually turned the tables on them (*La course des Sergents de Ville* ca. 1910?); pumpkins gliding from a cart were chased by the grocer, his donkey and passers-by through sewers and over roofs (*La course des potirons*, 1907; English title, *The Pumpkin Race*). For any Keystone comedy to omit the chase would have been an unpardonable crime. It was the climax of the whole, its orgiastic finale—a pandemonium,

with onrushing trains telescoping into automobiles and narrow escapes down ropes that dangled above a lion's den.

As should by now be clear, these chases and states of extremity involved not only cops and robbers but pieces of furniture and highways as well. Comedy was cinematic also in that it extended its range to include the whole of physical reality that could be reached by the camera eye. The rule was that inanimate objects held important positions and developed preferences of their own. More often than not they were filled with a certain malice towards anything human. When the pumpkins rolled down or up a slope it was indeed as if they wanted to play a practical joke on their pursuers. And who would not remember Chaplin's heroic scraps with the escalator, the beach chair and the unruly Murphy bed? Among the scheming objects those devised for our comfort were in fact particularly vicious. Instead of serving man, these progressive gadgets turned out to be on the best of terms with the very elements they were supposed to harness; instead of making us independent of the whims of matter, they actually were the shock troops of unconquered nature and inflicted upon us defeat after defeat. They conspired against their masters, they gave the lie to the alleged blessings of mechanisation. Their conspiracy was so powerful that it nipped Buster Keaton's smile in the bud. How could he possibly smile in a mechanised world? His unalterable impassivity was an admission that in such a world the machines and contrivances laid down the law and that he had better adjust himself to their exigencies. Yet at the same time this impassivity, inhuman though it was, made him appear touchingly human, for it was inseparable from sadness, and you felt that, had he ever smiled while pushing the buttons or declaring his love, he would have betrayed his sadness and endorsed a state of affairs which caused him to behave like a gadget.

Of course, it was all comedy and the threats never came true. Whenever destructive natural forces, hostile objects, or human brutes seemed to win the day, the balance shifted abruptly in favour of their sympathetic victims. The pumpkins returned to the cart, the pursued escaped through a loophole and the weak reached a provisional haven. Frequently such minor triumphs were due to feats of acrobatic skill. Yet unlike most circus productions, film comedy did not highlight the performer's proficiency in braving death and surmounting impossible difficulties; rather, it minimised his accomplishments in a constant effort to present successful rescues as the outcome of sheer chance. Accidents superseded destiny; unpredictable circumstances now foreshadowed doom, now jelled into propitious constellations for no visible reason. Take Harold Lloyd on the skyscraper; what protected him from falling to death was not his prowess but a random combination of external and completely incoherent events which, without being intended to come to his help, yet dovetailed so perfectly that he could not have fallen even had he wanted to. Accidents were the very soul of slapstick. This too was intrinsically cinematic, for it conformed to the spirit of a medium predestined to capture the fortuitous aspects of physical life. Since there were



so many happy endings, the spectator was led to believe that the innate malice of objects yielded to benevolence in certain cases. Harry Langdon, for instance, belonged among nature's favourites. A somnambulist fairy-tale prince, he waddled safely through a world of mortal dangers, not in the least aware that he was safe only because the elements succumbed to his babyish candour and sweet idiocy. Was it not even possible to influence chance and assuage spite? When attacked by a tough, Chaplin's Tramp in his anguish invoked the magic power of rhythm to avert the worst; he performed a few delicate dance steps and choice gestures and, with the aid of these emergency rites, hypnotized the tough into a state of incredulous wonder which paralysed him just long enough to enable the cunning Tramp to take to his heels.

Any such gag was a small unit complete in itself and any comedy was a package of gags which, in music hall fashion, were autonomous entities rather than parts of a story. As a rule, there was a story of a sort, but it had merely the function of stringing these monad-like units together. What counted was that they succeeded each other uninterruptedly, not that their succession implemented some plot. To be sure, they often happened to build up a halfway consistent intrigue, yet the intrigue was never of so exacting a nature that its significance would have encroached on that of the units composing it. Even though *The Gold Rush* (1925) and *City Lights* (1930) transcended the genre, they culminated in such episodes as the dance with the fork or the misdemeanour of the swallowed whistle, gag clusters which, for meaning and effect, depended so little upon the narrative in which they appeared that they could easily be isolated without being mutilated. Film comedy was an ack-ack of gags. For the rest, it indulged in absurdity, as if to make it unmistakably clear that no catastrophe was meant to be real nor any action to be of consequence. The non-sensical frolics of Sennett's bathing girls smothered the tender beginnings of comprehensible plots, and the many false moustaches on display bespoke a joyous zest for unaccountable foolishness. Absurdity stripped events of their possible meanings. And since it thus cut short the implications they might otherwise have conveyed to us, we were all the more obliged to absorb them for their own sake. It is true that comedy presented acts of violence and extreme

situations only to disavow their seriousness a moment later, yet as long as they persisted they communicated nothing but themselves. They were as they were, and the shots rendering them had no function other than to make us watch spectacles too crude to be perceived with detachment in real life. It was genuine cinema, with the emphasis on the pranks of objects and the sallies of nature. This explains why from early slapstick to Chaplin's full-length films, the visuals in a measure retained the character of snapshots. They were matter of fact records rather than expressive photographs. But would not art photography have introduced all the meanings which the comedy makers instinctively wanted to avoid? Their concern was alienated physical existence.

Film comedy died with the silent film. Perhaps the Depression precipitated its death. But it did not die from the change of social conditions, however unfortunate; rather, it was killed by a change within the medium itself—the addition of dialogue. Those nightmarish tangles, games of speed and plays with inarticulate matter, which were inseparable from comedy, occurred in depths of material life which words do not penetrate; speech with all that it involves in articulate thoughts and emotions was therefore bound to obscure the very essence of the genre. Comedy ceased to be comedy when the admixture of dialogue blurred our visual experience of speechless events; when the necessity of following more or less intelligible talk lured us from the material dimension, in which everything just happened, to the dimension of discursive reasoning in which everything was, somehow, labelled and digested verbally. It was inevitable indeed that the spoken word should put an end to a genre which was allergic to it. Harpo alone survives from the silent era. Like the gods of antiquity who after their downfall lived on as puppets, bugbears and other minor ghosts, haunting centuries which no longer believed in them, Harpo is a residue of the past, an exiled comedy god condemned or permitted to act the part of a mischievous hobgoblin. Yet the world in which he appears is so crowded with dialogue that he would long since have vanished were it not for Groucho, who supports the spectre's irresponsible doings by destroying dialogue from within. As dizzying as any silent collision, Groucho's word cataclysms wreak havoc on language, and among the resultant debris Harpo continues to feel at ease.



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Hollywood is reported to have 42 feature films, 19 documentary shorts and 400 scripts all with anti-Communist themes. (*Warner Bros' press release.*)

Canada's strangest motion picture theatre, at remote Cross Lake, 160 miles northwest of the Pas, is operated by the "Company of 20". . . . The "Company of 20" is a group of Indian trappers which has demonstrated modern business methods to scattered neighbors and aroused admiration in most northern trappers. A fur dealer's license has been incorporated into the expanding business and the theatre's customers can buy a season ticket for a muskrat pelt. . .

While other Indians bought outboard motors and canoes, this group purchased power saws, cut down their own trees, hewed their own logs with their saws and erected a log building and purchased a motion picture projector with built-in generator. "Club members", says the leader, "are anxious to prove to the Dominion government that they are equally anxious to help themselves to provide better living conditions and education for all occupants of this reserve". The long winter nights made the motion picture exhibition business boom, and the returns were reinvested to expand the business to include a small refreshment concession. North Indians could now munch peanuts, popcorn and other white man's delicacies, while they watched the favorite wild west show. Cowboy pictures find an appreciative audience here, *Hopalong Cassidy* being a favorite among adults as well as youngsters". (*Box Office.*)





Silent Film Comedy. Top, Chester Conklin with Mack Sennett Bathing Belles in a 1917 comedy. Below, left: "Murphy's IOU", a Mack Sennett comedy (1917), with Mabel Normand, Mack Sennett, Fred Mace. Below, right: an early Chaplin, "Between Showers" (1914), with Chaplin, Ford Sterling, Chester Conklin.







# WAYS OF MELODRAMA

R. E. Durnat



Images of violence in the American cinema: top left, Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray in "Double Indemnity", below, Carl Kent, Frank Lovejoy, Lloyd Bridges in "The Sound of Fury", and above, William Holden and Nancy Olsen in "Union Station"

## I

BECAUSE VIOLENCE is a leading characteristic of the postwar world, it is reflected in a good deal of contemporary art, and in consequence melodrama is no longer considered as a wholly disreputable element. A few notes on the inter-relationship of melodrama and significance (in the widest sense of the word) in the cinema should be of interest.

A melodrama has been defined as a story where the characters exist to justify the action. This simple definition, on which Elizabeth Bowen's "Notes on Writing a Novel" makes interesting comment<sup>(1)</sup>, at once brings up complications. In the cinema they would arise thus:

The cinema expresses itself primarily through movement. Purposeful movement of an animate being—a man kisses a woman, or walks downstairs, or runs across the road—is generally called Action. Movement and action cannot be rigidly separated: for instance, a horserider in long shot, decorating the picture, is best classified as movement, but in close shot, or going somewhere of importance to the story, is counted as action. A stagecoach, itself inanimate

<sup>1</sup> "What about the idea that the function of action is to express the characters? This is wrong. The characters are there to provide the action . . . It is the indivisibility of the act from the actor, and the inevitability of that act on the part of that actor, that gives action verisimilitude".

but representative of people, can similarly come under both headings.

Drama demands that action and movement shall be motivated and/or express something. One director or script-writer will express himself largely by means of movement—by curtains blown in the wind at significant moments, or by camera tracks into significant close-ups. David Lean uses this method almost exclusively (and somewhat monotonously). The same thing may be expressed by means of action. A man camping out on the prairie hears a coyote whine; he expresses his state of mind by firing wildly into the darkness. The man's firing at the coyote is motivated solely by his own state of mind. But if you pre-create some reason for his action—for instance, the coyote had bitten him—your action begins to become melodrama. The motivation, being obvious, no longer reveals the man's state of mind: all it tells us is that he is not a forgiving person—a negative thing. Make the motivation simpler—he was frightened that the coyote would steal his chickens, or that the whine was in fact that of an Indian spy—and his action reveals nothing about him at all. The firing just becomes reflex action following on the context.

But one notices (1) how easily action slips into melodrama, (2) that the links between melodramatic episodes are the simplest emotions unanalysed and taken for granted, and



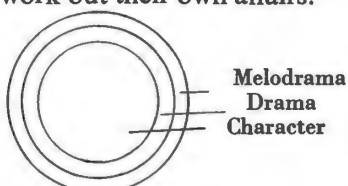
(3) that melodrama is *organised* or *consequential* action—springing from previous action, or from a state of threatened action. If you like, the melodramatic episode is to drama as slapstick is to comedy. Many comedies have slapstick climaxes, and the cheapest slapstick episode can be a framework or scaffolding for comedy. Similarly with drama and melodrama.

But if, as well as this logic of melodrama, you have a simultaneous development of feeling, you have a film which is both drama *and* melodrama. The *action* of a film may be melodramatic, but its movement and settings psychologically revealing. A gangster is betrayed to the police by his moll, and trapped in a museum: first in a room full of Reynolds and Gainsboroughs; but as the police drive him from room to room the art becomes more and more primitive, until he is finally surrounded by the ghastly deformed breasts and tortured faces of tribal totem poles. Combined with the action, this could illustrate: (1) disgust with women, (2) acute realisation of his own weakness, and (3) a reversion from a comparatively civilised veneer to a state of bestial terror. The sequence would be worthy of Welles at his wildest, but his films lack the scope and depth of context that could make his ingenious mirror and aquarium scenes significant. If a character has no real significance (which he can be given only by acute and careful observation, lacking in *The Lady from Shanghai*), then neither will any amount of extraneous symbolism or ingenuity.

Similarly melodrama must have relevance. In these notes I do not claim to deal with all its forms, but mainly with those possessing a context of some significance. It might be argued that melodrama is simply an arbitrary extension of drama: a fist fight, for instance, is a more or less arbitrary extension of hate, disagreement or competition, and adds nothing to the drama except physical intensity. Nonetheless, a melodramatic situation can often provide a searching test of character.

This idea is a basic device of John Huston's: *The Maltese Falcon*, *We Were Strangers*, *Treasure of Sierra Madre*, *Key Largo* and *The Asphalt Jungle* all put keenly observed realistic characters in highly melodramatic situations. The melodrama springs from simple emotions (greed, patriotism, self-preservation, escape) and is used to investigate not merely the quality of that emotion but the characters as a whole. Huston's films become dramas. Thus drama may be an extension of melodrama as surely as melodrama can be an extension of drama.

The reason for this lies in the nature of artistic conception. Character is often best exhibited in a special circumstance, but in order to place him convincingly in this circumstance we have to explain how his character got him there. Many artists—notably Henry James—begin by imagining a situation or a conflict, then shape the characters to fit it, then alter the emphasis of the conflict or situation as the characters evolve in their minds. Others (D. H. Lawrence) begin with a character and let him make his own situations. Lawrence said that his method of writing a novel was to invent two couples and let them work out their own affairs.



The diagram shows a circle divided into three rings. Character is generally considered as the core of a person's



Pure melodrama: Hitchcock's "The Lady Vanishes". Paul Lukas, Mary Clare



Image-situation: the savage posse in "The Dividing Line"



Richard Conte as the fugitive, Shelley Winters as the helpful floozie, in "Cry of the City"





Poetic melodrama: "Orphée"

reaction to circumstance (actions), so I represent it as the innermost circle. Next to it is drama. Drama and melodrama together correspond to what Elizabeth Bowen called "action", but to avoid confusion I shall use this term in the sense of "purposeful movement of an animate being", emphasising the plastic rather than the narrative qualities of a film. The difference between drama and melodrama lies in whether the emphasis is on the emotion or the action. Outside comes the circle of melodrama, furthest from the centre but containing (*i.e.* necessitating) the other two, just as drama "contains" but does not necessarily reveal character, and just as character in art is investigated within a situation.

A work of art can first be conceived at any point in the circle. The first idea to come to Henry James would be that of a dramatic situation and the general characteristics of the protagonists. As the idea developed, the protagonists would take on more complex and finely developed characters. A story by D. H. Lawrence, conversely, moves outwards from the innermost circle. It is often impossible to say where a work of art was first conceived—imagination can be so flexible and so sensitive, adjusting its mechanism for suiting character to situation and vice versa, that the work seems to have been conceived at all points in the circle simultaneously.

Most fiction, drama and films incorporate some element from each part of the circle. It is misleading to speak of

drama and melodrama as two distinct forms, and then try to draw distinctions between them; they are not forms but elements, and often occur side by side, and inextricably confused.

## II

There is a type of film aptly called in this country "emotional melodrama". In such films emotions are like clubs which characters swing about their heads and knock each other (and often themselves) out with. The American term is "heavies"—*Deception*, *Stolen Life*, and so on. The rules and regulations are as clearly worked out as in any heavy-weight bout: there is no real characterisation, and the films are always deliberately limited to well within the "drama" circle, with melodrama permissible as a climax (Davis shoots Rains). The keynote of the emotional melodrama is that emotions which in a melodrama serve as the links between melodramatic episodes are here used to bring about not action but another emotion. The only way out is generally suicide or death in childbirth.

The Americans are the most mechanically efficient in this field; the French have produced some enjoyable examples, though in Europe generally, and Sweden above all, the



The "heavy": knocking each other out with emotions. David Brian, Joan Crawford and Kent Smith in "The Damned Don't Cry"

passions-on-the-farm tradition is too prominent. The English insistence on good taste in emotional fodder puts them at a disadvantage with the emotional melodrama, and the *Madonna of the Seven Moons*—Jassy cycle never did justice to its own hedonistic possibilities. The latest of the series, *The Reluctant Widow*, lacked unforgivably the courage of its own vulgarity, and devoted half its time to intentionally burlesquing itself. *The Seventh Veil* was more intelligent, but in their successor to it, *Daybreak*, the Boxes yielded to the temptation to complicate the intrigue at the expense of the drama.

The public hangman in *Daybreak* is not only a public hangman but (on the side) a barge-owner and a hairdresser. His wife knows that he's a barge-owner, but not that he's a hairdresser or a hangman. His colleague in the hairdressing



Crisis in the slaughterhouse: Sylvana Mangano and Vittorio Gassman in "Bitter Rice"



business knows that he's also a hangman, but not that he's a barge-owner. A Scandinavian seaman seduces the wife and assaults the barge-owner, for whose presumed murder he is sentenced to be hanged by the hangman. Under the impression that her husband is dead, his wife shoots herself and he, having resigned his hangmanship and no longer a barge-owner but still a hairdresser, cuts his throat. The story is told in flashback.

The same tendency toward absurd elaboration can be noted in a good many "heavies"—most of Hal Wallis's from *Sorry Wrong Number* onwards—with the result that any investigation of character, even on a superficial level, becomes impossible. For as soon as emotional melodrama begins to investigate character, it becomes—partially at least—drama. At their best, the Americans show a sensible tendency to unite the "heavy" and the thriller: the vintage Hal Wallis productions (*In This Our Life*, *Martha Ivers*, *File on Thelma Jordon*, *I Walk Alone*, *No Man of her Own*) and films like *Double Indemnity* and *Phantom Lady* are composed equally of Chandler-style material—vicious *femmes fatales* who in most cases provide the motivation (greed and sex explode into violence), the authoritative tours of seedy, honky-tonk backgrounds—and of heavy novelette situations stemming from "The Saturday Evening Post" and elsewhere. They are successful because not weighed down with more apparatus than they can bear, and some are better than others because the talent of a superior director (Huston with *In This Our Life*, Wilder and Brackett with *Double Indemnity*) shows through.

Most of the films are constructed as thrillers with a strong emphasis on emotion, but Huston with *In This Our Life* reverses the procedure, subduing the melodrama and concentrating on the emotional drama: Ophuls did the same thing with *Caught*. These are cases of "heavies" almost turning into dramas. The converse can be seen in films like *The Passionate Friends* or the French *Pattes Blanches*; these start out as dramas, but because the drama is inadequate they turn into emotional melodramas. In the case of David Lean, one suspects that the new technique he was on the edge of has not (yet) developed further than sheer chronological complication.

Deteriorations of this sort come from a failure in conception; what begins as an investigation of character is not developed, and the characters have to be fitted improbably into melodramatic situations. Italian films like *Flesh Will Surrender* and *Tomorrow is too Late* show the same process. They are slow and ponderous, and great efforts are made to invest inadequate shots and actions with far more significance than they can bear. Time is not kind to this type of failure, either—one sees even what happened to the emotional melodrama in *All Quiet on the Western Front*.

### III

Much the same happens to the "pure" melodrama (the thriller and run-of-the-mill western) but, for aesthetic reasons, more slowly. Sitting recently through *The 39 Steps*, a film I did not see on its original release, I was surprised to find myself totally unmoved by every excitement, except that of Hannay jumping off the train when it stopped on the bridge, irritated by its facetious whimsicality (the Donat—Carroll exchanges), and quite unconvinced by its wildly theatrical acting.

Oddly enough, *The Lady Vanishes*, with its vivid and recognisable caricatures of English types, its catching of the Munich mood and its pleasantly well integrated script

and excitements, remains enjoyable. It has a definite rapprochement with reality. But *Foreign Correspondent*, with its nominal (not organic) little people v. Germany tie-up, and its colourless characterisation of ambassadors and their daughters, fails to convince or excite. One prefers the frankly picaresque *Saboteur*, with its undisguised, authentic borrowings from earlier films.

In skilled hands the pure melodrama, the melodrama of pursuit and escape, of threat and self-preservation, can—like the emotional melodrama—be entertaining enough. The characterisation can be relatively simple and superficial but it must, like the situations, convince on its own level. How impressive the combination of emotional and "pure" melodrama can be is demonstrated by *The Third Man*, an engrossing film which yields great pleasure at each viewing. It is not only that the technique is particularly expert and sophisticated, but that the melodrama is subordinated to realism, which is closely interwoven with character—the melodrama, in fact, of significant context. The American and Italian use of melodrama offers in this respect the most consistent interest.

### IV

We have something near a perfect fusion when the melodramatic episodes are used to analyse and comment on the emotions acting as links between these episodes; when the emotions themselves are of some subtlety and complexity, and when their revelation is not overshadowed by flamboyant treatment of the melodrama itself.

It is far easier to obtain tension from a gunfight or a chase than from a mental conflict. The responsibility here lies on director and scriptwriter. The writer must invent situations that will provide powerful and expressive images, the director must realise these images on the screen. If the writer has failed to provide suitable image-situations, if he expresses mental conflict only in terms of commentary or dialogue, the director can, by visual imagination and sensitive catching of a relevant atmosphere round the dialogue, give the situation expressive images; but he is unlikely to succeed completely with this.

An excellent example of a good image-situation is this from Geoffrey Homes' screenplay for *The Dividing Line*. At the beginning of the manhunt after the terrified Spanish-American fugitive, the organiser of the hunt says: "Don't shoot unless you have to". The newspaperman also involved in the pursuit is spotted by an advance guard of the posse who, mistaking him for the fugitive, promptly blaze away. Bullets whine and ricochet about the unarmed newspaperman. The machinery of melodrama is used naturally to reveal the savagery of the posse.

A film hamstrung by weak image-situations is *Kiss of Death*. Its first point is that the hero, Nick Bianco (Mature), became a criminal through pressure of circumstances. The commentary tells us he couldn't get a job, and goes on: "This is how Nick Bianco did his Christmas shopping for his kids". And we see him with two accomplices stealing jewellery from a department store. A weak presentation of pressure of circumstances makes the episode look no more than cheaply sentimental.

Every dramatic conflict in the film is expressed through dialogue, much of it in limp scenes at the D.A.'s office. Bianco's love for his children, his repugnance at the thought of being a stool-pigeon, his grief at his wife's suicide, all these key motives are revealed in images of conversation. The image which the screenwriters impress on our minds



to illustrate these emotions is simply that of two men sitting on either side of a desk.

Conversation in itself is not necessarily a weak image-situation, as Polonsky's *Force of Evil* indicates. The distinction is that the conversations of *Force of Evil* are intensely atmospheric, and that they make their points not in dialogue alone but by a combination of word spoken and reaction observed. Conversations in American sociological thrillers tend to be simply filmed radio dialogue, with nothing left for the camera to observe. The reactions are merely stock reactions to make the conversations look convincing.

Seeing *Call Northside 777* a second time I found it was possible to close one's eyes for long periods and yet follow perfectly situation, character, relationship and even locale, even though I had forgotten the accompanying visual images.

*Call Northside 777*, *Panic in the Streets* (with the exception of a few moments), *The House on 92nd Street*, *The Naked City*, *Street With No Name*, *Union Station*, all suffer from poor image-situations invented by the writers: rather monotonously, powerful images are found for the passages of melodramatic action, but the revelation of character is restricted almost entirely to dialogue and conversation. *Boomerang*, de Rochemont's first serious drama, and Siodmak's unpretentious, under-appreciated *Cry of the City*, were the only real successes of them all.

The films may be divided into two groups: those where the melodrama is intended to be incidental to the drama (*Panic in the Streets*), and those where the drama (in effect if not in intention) is incidental to the melodrama—*Kiss of Death*, *Union Station*. Where the melodrama is successful, as in *Street With No Name*, the film is enjoyable as such. But the more pretentious films suffer considerably from their scripts, and the inability of merely competent directors to introduce exciting filmic elements into them.

*The Naked City* took the form of the investigation by a police officer of a New York murder. Hellinger's intention was to use this as a pretext for examining New York life. Unfortunately the majority of the interviews took place in the detective's office, divorcing the main characters from their homes and habitual backgrounds, and the examination of New York life consisted mainly of their answers to the detective's questions. Their reactions are shown in dialogue, and in a detective's office, when they would hardly be at their most natural. Even when the younger detective investigates on the spot, the cameos through which we go are conventional and tell us little. The all-in wrestler is seen doing—guess what?—all-in wrestling exercises.

In *Call Northside 777*, James Stewart's investigations take him into people's homes, into their contexts, as it were. But the weakness here is absurdly obvious: when a visitor calls, it is customary to stop what one is doing and to sit down opposite him and talk. The scriptwriters let this formality weaken all their image-situations, and Hathaway lacked the skill to overcome this obstacle as Polonsky might have done.

*Call Northside* and *Panic in the Streets* can both be resolved into a series of conversations and interviews. Wherever placed—in cafés, police stations, dives, ships, tenements, newspaper offices, prisons, council chambers—both films remain essentially a series of conversations whose point is expressed entirely in dialogue. *Call Northside* does not even show characters in action, and only Richard Conte's Weicek and Lee J. Cobb reveal any qualities (love of his

wife and a tendency to fib respectively) not instantly deducible from their physiognomies. The principal characters in nearly all these films are hackneyed—the poor slaving mother, the blowsy slut, the comforting wife-girl friend figure, the stolid fellow with a keen conscience underneath: Dana Andrews in *Boomerang* goes through exactly the same conflicts as Paul Douglas in *Panic in the Streets*, and the only characteristic of all the heroes to distinguish them from the ordinary well-disposed stock type is, simply, conscience. There is no doubt, though, that many of the secondary portraits are interesting, particularly those in *Panic in the Streets*.

Kazan's sense of atmosphere makes this one of the best of the thrillers. Hathaway conspicuously lacks any feeling for atmosphere; in *Call Northside*, for instance, no contrasting moods are evoked in the scenes in the prison governor's office, the police station or the newspaper office. The treatment is slick and perfunctory. *Panic in the Streets* is obviously superior in this respect, but even so Kazan's realism is a surface matter, more resourceful in effect than original in conception. The real renaissance in Hollywood melodrama came through some smaller and fresher films, like those associated with Dore Schary—*They Live by Night*, *The Window*, *Crossfire*, *The Set Up*, *Deadline at Dawn*—with *Force of Evil* and *Act of Violence* and the least pretentious of the Fox films, *Cry of the City*.

These films point the difference between artistic realism and Hathaway's or Kazan's perfunctory sense of locale. *Crossfire* was made entirely in the studio: it builds up brilliantly the mood of listlessness and boredom, of stored-up hate with nowhere to go, of dull, endless bar-crawling around cities by night and card-games by day. Dmytryk's direction has a sense of the seedy, of bare walls and low bars, dramatic use of lighting and angles. Even the minor and inferior *Deadline at Dawn*, though its attempt to catch the spirit of a big city by night failed as a whole, gave us several short and fascinating portraits of other lives—portraits as terse and vivid as those in *Panic in the Streets*. It was disappointing to find Clifford Odets' script destroying everything it had built up by false touches like the sub-Prévert crook (Joseph Calleia) and the silly twist ending. Of *They Live by Night* and *The Window* enough has been written already. In general, the flabby and conventional portraiture of the bigger films contrasts unfavourably with these smaller ones.

Similarly, the first few moments of *Intruder in the Dust* show remarkable sensitiveness. Long shot of a church steeple over the tops of trees, its bell ringing the hour: the sound of the bell is heard over the succeeding shots. The camera pans round (high elevation) the town square—the sun, the cars, the shops and the chromium signs. Cut to a man waiting at a shoeshine stand. After a moment he gets up, goes into the barber's saloon: "Where's the boy?" "Haven't you heard?" the men reply, "the niggers won't be around on the streets to-day . . . shot a white man in the back . . .". Through the windows as the barbers shave their customers, people drift by along the sidewalk: a police siren squeals—"That'll be him!"—people begin to hurry past: customers get up, one not waiting to clean the soap off his face, and rush out. A car with a flat tyre sirens and clatters its way to the kerb. Cut to a first-person viewpoint inside the car, the sheriff driving, the gazing crowd seen through the windows, and two black hands in the foreground, resting on the back of the driver's seat. . . .

*Intruder in the Dust* is a work of brilliant observation rather



than self-expression, and this makes comparison with the semi-documentary style salutary. The mechanics of its plot are far neater and better integrated than those of the sociological thrillers; there are two complex main characters (the negro and the boy), and although the rest of the characterisation is more conventional and the important psychological conflict in the boy's mind has to be expressed in commentary, the *minor* figures in *Intruder in the Dust* are as well rendered as the *major* characters in the semi-documentaries.

One is reminded here of the weaknesses of *Force of Evil*, of the reasons why it remained a complex and intriguing film rather than a complete experience.

Events evolve but characters remain static in the film. Joe Morse, its hero, has two conflicting urges, the urge to make his own way and the urge to save those whom he likes. He knows that people want to be bullied into the evil of which they are afraid and he is bitterly conscious of his own inability to resist corruption. Doris is torn between her love for and disgust with Joe, and the two halves of his character: Leo distrusts his brother Joe but is too weak to withstand him. There are two interesting smaller parts—the intimidated book keeper of the small 'numbers' bank, and the racketeers' wife who, half-maternally, half-sadistically, loves Joe for his humanity and weakness.

These complex characters, however, do not develop. What Doris says does not affect Joe who, drunk as he is, still lurches off to a showdown after his brother has been kidnapped: she is in danger of becoming reconciled to the evil in Joe, and of being flattened by his forcefulness, but only the second and less serious process is shown: no change, degeneration or despair is observable in Leo when he moves from a small to a big 'numbers' racket man. Action springs from intriguing characters, but it does not serve to develop character, only to bring events to a head.

Further, instead of breaking down complexity into images, Joe explains his thoughts (and nearly everyone else's), Doris hers, Leo and Leo's wife his, and so on, in conversation. Excessive reliance on the spoken word is particularly obvious in one sequence: the cinematographic equivalent to Joe's comment, "Doris wanted me to make love to her", is Doris looking into the camera (first-person viewpoint), wanting to be made love to. The commentary is not merely superfluous but weakens, because it distracts from, the visual image. The same thing occurs twice in the last sequence.

The conversations of *Force of Evil* are, of course, unusually well written and directed by Polonsky, and the images and acting as powerful as images of conversation can be.

*Cry of the City*, the best of the Fox thrillers, skilfully manipulates our sympathies (alternating between pursuers and pursued): we sympathise with the escaping criminal, Rome (Richard Conte) and hope he will escape the underworld types whom he encounters; at the same time there is no sentimentality. Rome turns a gun on his mother, and then the girl who helped him, the doctor who patched up his wounds, the old convict who assisted his escape, the younger brother aping his ways, all become involved in his flight and desperation and suffer for it. This portrayal, in melodramatic terms, of criminal egotism is startling and exciting. Siodmak's direction has a fine ear for the sounds of the city, and an observant eye for the backgrounds and the snatches of action you see through windows while your characters talk.

The success of these films makes one wonder, finally, what is the justification of the 'newsreel' style. Newsreels are

duller than most fictional films: location photography has by now lost its freshness as such, the urgency of the commentary of *Boomerang* has degenerated into a verbal laziness for what the writers and directors fail to present in image—and the endless procession of undercover men and women also indicates excessive exploitation of a formula.

## V

At the end of the war, significant melodrama in Britain seemed on the right track, most interesting being the straightforward extension of an everyday situation into melodrama with *Waterloo Road*. Then Launder and Gilliat switched to the conventional eccentricities and situations of *London Belongs to Me*. Ealing followed the convincing, interesting *It Always Rains on Sunday* with the efficient routine of *The Blue Lamp* and *Pool of London*, and the limitations of these are reflected in almost every other British melodrama. The best of them, like *The Small Voice*, and the worst, like *Good Time Girl*, have been hamstrung not so much by any problem of image-situation, of integration of drama and melodrama, but simply by cliché characters. A few films have brought a degree of freshness into their conventions (*Once a Jolly Swagman*, *Chance of a Lifetime*), but in the sphere of melodrama itself only *The Third Man*, discussed earlier, has reinvigorated a tradition. It is disappointing that British melodramas do not set themselves a higher target than imitation of American models: even when the response to locale is good, as in *Pool of London*, the characters and their relationships are second-hand. At other times, the wholesale borrowing of West End theatrical types—suburban housewife, crusty grandmother, amiable father, jovial promiscuous Hermione Baddeley type, etc.—does not produce anything fresher.

## VI

One can understand the mistrust of melodrama on the part of film critics, but it is a pity this should lead to the serious depreciation of the Italian style represented by *Bitter Rice* and *Without Pity*. My intention is not to indicate that they are masterpieces (they aren't), but that their method is as worthy of serious consideration as the American crime documentaries.

De Santis uses a melodramatic story to point the aspects of life (*Bitter Rice*) or the conflict (*Caccia Tragica*) which form the themes of his films, and the realistic element to heighten and justify the melodramatic action. The close interweaving of story and background means that every episode becomes ambivalent; it is one of a chain of melodramatic scenes, and also expresses something about theme or characters. The melodrama springs from reality, and reality informs the melodrama.

With the more florid melodramatic style of the Italian film it is less easy to appreciate social or psychological connotations. But these do exist, *pace* the critic who measured de Santis' progress from Art to Commerce by the length of leg his heroines display.

The sex element in *Bitter Rice* springs from the primitive conditions and the animalism of ricefield life as well as from box-office requirements. Similarly, the violence of this film and of *Caccia Tragica*—not exaggerated to judge from the news reports of Italy—has a perfectly legitimate place in the drama. Leaving aside for the moment the purely aesthetic pleasure derived from de Santis' understanding of the medium—which some American directors might well envy—the films show de Santis' skill at the immediate translation of relation-



ship into situation, of problem into predicament and character into action.

Straightway *Bitter Rice* displays Sylvana's animalism (jiving), her disillusionment (exchanges with the soldiers), and her kind-heartedness (she introduces Gioi to the unofficial employment agency on the train). But her kind-heartedness is only impulse, and as soon as Gioi's interests conflict with hers, she takes the lead in opposing her. Even her kind-heartedness is mingled with her longing for excitement (Gioi was the crook's moll). We see her continual impatience with the hard way of honesty the sergeant offers her, and her naive belief and trust in the promises of the crook who manipulates her credulity for his own ends. Even at the end her weakness and inadequacy still haunt her: she is unable to fire the pistol in the slaughter-house scene. There is a stunted, helpless goodness in her—she helps Gioi, she realises what virtue means (she wanders disconsolate in the rain) too late (after the rape), is harshly reminded of the possible consequences of her weakness and the crook's brutality (the miscarriage). Interwoven with all this is the masterly exposition of ricefield life; its misery (the rain), its despair (the fight between the regulars and the outsiders), its animalism, and, above all, the sabotage of this miserable labour by a band of self-interested men (the same idea recurs in *Caccia Tragica*).

The characterisation of Gioi, of the crook and the sergeant is equally illustrated by the action. If not searching, all these figures are adequately created and have verisimilitude. I think one would have a hard time proving any of the characters less real than the cops, floozies and bartenders in American thrillers.

Both types of film are concerned with predicament and situation. Neither attempts to go deep below the surface. Widmark in *Panic in the Streets*, for instance, has a worry about a tailor's bill, a touch generally applauded. No one could call this "going below the surface"—it was simply an interesting added predicament. In their efforts to find originality within the formula, screenwriters tend to cram in more and more of these little touches and side problems whose relevance is dubious. The predicaments in *Bitter Rice* and *Caccia Tragica* are at least an integral part of the theme. The Italian formula has, of course, its disadvantages. A script has to be extraordinarily good to integrate complicated melodrama satisfactorily with the drama, to manoeuvre the episodes into positions of significance, to prevent flamboyance from swamping revelation of character. *Caccia Tragica* was less happy in this respect than de Santis' succeeding *Bitter Rice*.

Already Lattuada failed when he essayed this style with *Senza Pieta*, dismissed by most critics as trashy melodrama with pretensions: actually it is a sincere enough film which fails not through dishonesty but through inability to deal with the complex style this method requires.

One can see the script trying to follow the accepted rules of tragedy. The more hero and heroine try to free themselves from their fate, the more entangled they become. Their eventual death comes almost as a relief, since we feel that any more struggling on their part would only have debased them further. Unfortunately the relationship between the negro and the white girl is weak (he worships her like a dog, only wants to follow her around) and never becomes more than a series of hurried meetings and conversations. Their story remains a series of melodramatic incidents, brought about by a Peter Lorre-like procurer in a white suit, by the military police and various odd, unsatisfactory characters—not the general

circumstance of post-war chaos. Motivation is poor: we are led to believe that Angela was forced to become a prostitute because the procurer pushed her into the water and fished her out again, and then, without any perceptible change in her fortunes, she stops being one. Impossible soliloquies hold up the action at unsuitable moments, and the cutting is ragged.

But the cycle really begins to run to seed with Pietro Germi's *Lost Youth*. This illustrates nicely what happens when incompetence and a good formula combine. Though the film is a thriller, the standard of the image-situations (loving looks, family life, fathers failing to scold sons, breakfasts, pensive stares endlessly prolonged) is unexciting, and the melodrama (gangster leaves on scene of the crime cigarette lighter with his initials on it, bought because he always loses matchboxes), poor. By showing us shots of tiny tots pursuing each other with toy pistols, and giving a few statistics on the crime wave, the film tries to be socially significant. The script integrates neither its adolescent gangster's trifling characteristics nor his pathology as a whole into feeling, outlook or character (neurosis? need for excitement? Oedipus complex? degradation caused by war and familiarity with violence? lack of parental discipline? bad company? love of money? or some or all of these things?).

## VII

What is immediately apparent from these notes is that any formula, any style, is precisely as good as the artists it attracts. Of the many melodramas set in a contemporary reality, the failures are nearly always not the technical ones of melodrama but of a conventional or uninteresting perception of reality. This reminds one that melodrama set in spheres where realism is superseded by a poetic reality—the Western—or by fantasy, can nonetheless be significant, if there is an artist of calibre behind it.

*Alexander Nevski* is an interesting example of a melodrama allied to poetic reality. Its characterisation is elementary, its dramatic qualities conventional, and the fate of everyone concerned is decided in the long battle scene, which bears much the same relation to its context as the gunfight at the end of *The Lady from Shanghai*. One's enjoyment of the film is untainted by the slightest enthusiasm for one side the or other, despite the contrast of wicked, cruel Teuton knights with vertically held lances and helmets low over their hard eyes, and the noble heroism of the gruff, bearded Russians who have no helmets and thus appear less sinister. The past which the film creates is deliberately romanticised, the melodrama has the spaciousness and simplicity of a heroic legend—not simply a Russian legend, but one common to every country and race. The film makes no comment on the legend, just recreates it: it retains a Russian flavour in the emphasis on Russian humiliation and enemy panoply. The melodrama and the beauty of the images bear relevance to an imaginary and unreal past, yet remain significant.

Perhaps the very fact that the reality and the significance would have to be poetic and not realist is what deters development in this field. We have never had a truly picaresque Western, though *Stagecoach* approached it. Because of the dearth of fantasy, these notes have been restricted to the inter-relation of melodrama and realism: one remembers Fritz Lang's fairly crude attempts at melodrama with fantasy (*Dr. Mabuse, Metropolis*) twenty years ago but, in more recent times, of melodrama subservient to a world of poetic reality, *Les Jeux sont Faits* is an unsuccessful, and *Orphée* a successful example.





## A WORLD IN WATER

In "Mirror of Holland" a young Dutch director creates an impression of his native countryside and city life, by shooting all the scenes as reflections in water



ABOUT THE POST-WAR Dutch film industry and the documentaries so far produced, very little is known outside the country itself. The documentary tradition is strongest in Dutch film-making and has produced the most notable work, from Ivens' *Rain* to the present day. In feature films—a sense of drama never having been the strongest side of the Dutch creative artist—the record is less impressive. Even Dutch critics, lenient to the slender national output, were not much excited by a film like *Myrte and the Demons*, made by Paulbruno Schreiber and discussed two years ago in *SIGHT AND SOUND* by Roger Manvell. Only the music and the camerawork (Marinus Adam and Bert Haanstra respectively) drew—quite rightly—favourable response.

Bert Haanstra has recently completed a new film, *Mirror of Holland*, the result of an idea that could have sprung only from a Dutch mind: all the scenes of this pictorial poem were shot as reflections in water, but with the camera used upside down, so that the images appear the right way up. The result is that every object is disfigured even by the slightest ruffle of water, into a weird, often abstract, sometimes bizarre and always graceful shape. And yet, paradoxical as this may sound, the film is real for all its unreality.

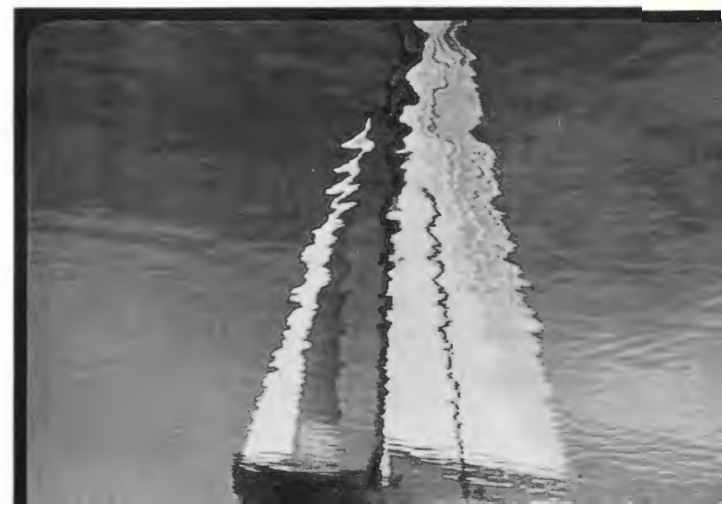
No script was written beforehand: for six weeks Haanstra roamed Holland in a tiny sailing boat, shooting whatever took his fancy. The film, therefore, was really created by cutting, shifting and interchanging the varied material on hand. But a line of logic runs throughout *Mirror of Holland*. The film is subdivided into sequences shot in the country and in towns, into passages with a quiet, relaxed rhythm and passages in which the impressions seem to be chasing each other at speed across the screen. This conscious alternation of rest and movement can be analysed as follows: rest (pastoral scenes), movement (city); then pastoral scenes again; abstract shots; a recurrence of movement; and, finally, the peace of nightfall.

The surprising thing about Haanstra's film is that, with no special effects, he evokes from the water of canals, lakes, streams, ditches, a picture that any Dutchman can see any day—if only he went to the length of standing on his head for it. Through his water-reflected images, Haanstra gives us the curious illusion of oscillating cow-backs and milk-cans, of dignified church towers breaking into a gay can-can, of cruelly distorted houses and street lamps.

The music by Max Vredenburg plays a considerable part in the film's success: scored for harp, flute, clarinet, cello, piano, vibraphone and some light cymbals, it contents itself with accentuating the images on the screen. A pupil of Paul Dukas, Vredenburg collaborated with Ivens on the making of his silent film *Surf*, and in 1947 wrote his first film score for a feature-length documentary on South Pole whaling.

The success of *Mirror of Holland*, which won first prize at the Cannes Festival, and has been widely praised—in its own country, raises hopes that we may soon see a return of the pre-war days when Ivens made his internationally known documentaries like *Zuyderzee*.

HANS SAALTINK.







Approach to degradation: Emil Jannings as the professor in "The Blue Angel"

## REVALUATION

### *The Blue Angel*

(Germany, 1929)



Josef von Sternberg

### Geoffrey Wagner

In the monthly SIGHT AND SOUND, we published a series of reviews by Roger Manvell of films now regarded as "classics," reassessing them on their intrinsic merits and also in relation to their social and technical importance today. Many readers asked for this feature to be revived, and so in following issues we shall publish Revaluations by a number of different critics, hoping thus to extend the range of the articles still further.

In this issue, a young American critic revalues *The Blue Angel*, one of the most famous films of the great German period. The problem of this film is basically the same as that of *The Last Laugh* and many other German productions of the 20's: how far is the emotionalism of self-pity an unconscious revelation of national mood—in the disintegrating, despairing postwar years of Berlin—with its sadism and hysteria not far below the surface? But, with von Sternberg's film, there is one difference. Coming from America, with a promising Hollywood career already established, he made the film as, so to speak, an outsider. Impregnated as it is with eroticism, the degradations of sex, self-torture and disgust, the cruelties of pleasure, these qualities can hardly be the result of prolonged living in that climate. That, all the same, they inspired such a willing response from the director, and that he found in the cabaret singer Dietrich such an extraordinary symbol, creates the dual fascination of the film. This is pointed by the fact that Sternberg took Dietrich with him back to Hollywood, and both found themselves in effect displaced persons. In the years that followed, Sternberg did little but create exquisite vacuous patterns round the exquisite vacuous figure of the star herself.

MADE IN 1929, the first year of sound, *The Blue Angel* refused to follow the then popular technique of photographing theatre, and clung tenaciously to the traditions of silent cinema. This is one reason why it can be seen again to-day with such enjoyment, although its dialogue serves mainly a narrative function. For this emphasis on pictorial quality forced Sternberg to concentrate on potentialities of the camera, and also of natural sound, like Clair and Hitchcock at the same time. He had already made seven silent films in Hollywood—*The Salvation Hunters* and *Underworld* among them—notable for their immense care in texture and composition: he came to Berlin for *The Blue Angel*, and actually shot an English as well as a German version. The former was first shown in Britain and America, much to the film's detriment. But this was not the only reason for its initial lack of success, despite previous international acclaim (in Paris it had to be banned): in England and, especially, America, it ran in most cities for only a few days, for it was not shown there until *Morocco* (1930) had created the Anglo-Saxon stereotype of Dietrich which has persisted to the present day—and to which, were it not for a gift for comedy as well as a

remarkable personality, she would long ago have succumbed. Recent Dietrich films, like *A Foreign Affair* and *Stage Fright*, show best perhaps how her theatrical presence resists the patina of mere *femme fatale* which directors like to cast over it.

In *The Blue Angel*, in the climate of Berlin at the end of the 'twenties, Sternberg created Dietrich's first and last real role, one that Siegfried Kracauer has described as follows:

"Her Lola Lola was a new incarnation of sex. This petty bourgeois tart, with her provocative legs and easy manners, showed an impassivity which incited one to grope behind her callous egoism and cool insolence. That such a secret existed, was also intimidated by her veiled voice, which, when she sang about her interest in love-making and nothing else, vibrated with nostalgic reminiscences and smouldering hopes." (From *Caligari to Hitler*, Dobson, London.)

This, then, was Dietrich's character study before her glamorisation into the puppet siren of England and America, the stylised sphinx who, presented with idiot regularity in film after film, would have subdued a lesser personality to nonentity. But there is something more about the original Dietrich in *The Blue Angel*: there is, by implication, a penetrating critique of existing social conditions, suggested in Heinrich Mann's novel, itself an *exposé* of the peculiar vices of German bourgeois society. In an admirable article in *The Saturday Review of Literature* Richard Griffith remarked that "if we had looked harder at *The Blue Angel* in 1931, we might have had some glimpse of Berlin's future".

To convey this picture of social decay, Sternberg makes full use of the medium:

"In this portrait of a middle-aged professor led to his downfall by a café entertainer, objects, buildings, and landscapes take on a life of their own; everything visible and audible accentuates the theme of the helpless and fatal pursuit of pleasure, the draining away of all social values".

So writes Griffith, and though I cannot recall a single landscape in the picture, this is good criticism; for, in this case, the personal theme shadows into an impending social disaster. Mass sadism and mass hysteria were about to break out in Germany, and this is, of course, a study of the spiritual torture by humiliation of a small-town man with whom everyone can readily identify himself. Thus, in an "Introduction" to an unacknowledged English translation of the novel (Jarrolds, London), J. Leslie Mitchell, who wrote in Lallans under the pseudonym Lewis Grassic Gibbon, calls the professor "an incarnation of the multitudes that time and circumstance have shaped to dull and foolish lives in civilization's back reaches". In Mann's novel, too, Rosa Fröhlich



(Lola Lola) is even more domineering than in the film. Of Sternberg's awareness of all this, Kracauer writes:

"(he) deepened this sadistic tendency by making Lola Lola destroy not only Jannings himself but his entire environment. A running motif in the film is the old church clock which chimes a popular German tune devoted to the praise of loyalty and honesty . . .—a tune expressive of Jannings' inherited beliefs. In the concluding passage, immediately after Lola Lola's song has faded away, this tune is heard for the last time as the camera shows the dead Jannings. Lola Lola has killed him, and in addition her song has defeated the chimes".

The bells, moreover, are first heard by Lola Lola when the professor tells her he is unmarried; they sound again when, in the empty classroom, he puts down the books on his desk, renounces his old life, and takes up the carnation she had given him. The degradation that follows is filled with pathos for a modern audience, since it is precisely that humiliation which came to the Jews. Professor Rath, the intellectual, over whose bed hangs the sign *Tue recht und scheue niemand*, is reduced at last to the *Zauberlehrling* of the conjurer, ordered to kneel at the foot of Lola Lola to pull on her stockings, condemned to stand on the stage before an audience of Aryans to have eggs broken over his pate and to cry like a cock.

Even at the beginning of the film the professor was, in several shots, haunted by the figure of a clown in the background: he, the one man of ideals, is but a clown when he enters the world of *The Blue Angel*. So, at the beginning, the cabaret he enters looks chaotic, almost surrealist with its whirling clouds, miasmic veils and shifting backdrops; at the end, when he is part of it, it is steady and brutal in its clarity. Everything connected with the professor suggests this interpretation—his favourite pupil being called Angst, the mitigation of his masculine nose-blowing after meeting Lola Lola, the very nickname Unrath (excrement) which was given later to the Jews.

Sex and sadism, individual and social, are the main themes of *The Blue Angel*. The imagery of Gunther Rittau's camera-work reflects them with care. The dead bird—which the professor is told, in the first scene, will never sing again—is singing again in Lola Lola's boudoir, and sings in the last shot of all in the person of Lola Lola herself. Then, for an instant, the twelve apostles in agonised poses of broken stone file round the great Hamburg church clock, and finally we have Marlene singing the lines which sum up the film—when a man burns in lust, who can find him salvation? And we remember that the very days of this adventure had been ripped off the calendar by the professor with Lola Lola's hair-curlers.

Sexual tension carries its corollary with it, nostalgia and despair. Ecstasy, by its very nature, cannot endure: in contrast to the cabaret scenes, the camera travels back slowly down the empty classroom as Jannings is about to leave it for good, and in this last lingering embrace, as it were, tenderly dramatises the protagonist's loneliness and nostalgia for his past life. For, banal as it was, it had the irrecoverable gift of innocence. Nor, in the final analysis, is Lola Lola herself wholly evil. As the maddened professor grips her by the throat, she asks him what he wants of her, and the pathos of her predicament is glimpsed—what more, one feels, is such a woman able to give?

The dramatic construction and the photographic compositions are centred, none the less, on the sex of Lola Lola. Their force and logic makes the presentation infinitely more gripping than the hypocritical eroticism of Sternberg's later



Lola Lola and the nightmare cabaret world of "The Blue Angel". Top: two scenes with Dietrich (notice the bird), the 20's incarnation of sex. Below: the professor has become a clown

Hollywood productions. Here he has served his atmosphere with an almost suffocating eroticism of costume: for the milieu itself, the cabaret, often proves—contrary to general opinion—highly anti-erotic on the screen. Sexiness wages war with eroticism, and it is all the more extraordinary to read serious critics like Maurice Bardèche and Robert Brasillach calling the film "a coarse melodrama . . . in bad taste".

It is interesting to recall, commenting to-day on the sharp sense of cinema shown by the costuming of *The Blue Angel*, how frequently Sternberg's women have appeared covered in



feathers, plumes and ostrich boas. Evelyn Brent's nickname in *Underworld* was in fact "Feathers", and in this film, as in others by Sternberg, after some scene of violence, the set would be inundated with oceans of swansdown. Possibly this was due to Travis Banton, who joined Paramount in 1924 (and put Louise Brooks in *The Canary Murder Case*, 1929, in almost exactly the same cap of feathers as Evelyn Brent), for he robbed the Marlene of *Morocco*, *Shanghai Express*, *Desire* and *Angel*, in all of which someone saw to it, with almost fetishist insistence, that the vedette of *The Blue Angel* should come up under a toque of feathers.

But in *The Blue Angel* the Marlene of Sternberg is literally described by costume. Lola Lola's blowzy cabaret clothes are a positive attribute of her character. Writing in *Pour Vous* (1932), André Maugé describes Sternberg's flair for costumes:

"... il connaît la valeur d'une robe et ce qu'elle peut apporter à une femme de troublant et de désirable. Il aime la douceur des plumes autour du cou, les dessous de dentelle, les pieds cambrés sur les hauts talons absurdes, les longs bas transparents, les jarrettières et les jaretelles, tout un erotisme un peu suranné de corsets et de chevilles fines..."

Yet this interpretation presupposes the later Dietrich films which were no more than stereotyped vehicles. In *The Blue Angel* she is still part of a theme which works itself out, as Jethro Bithell, the historian of modern German literature,

puts it of Mann's book, by exaggeration. She is magnificently assisted by Jannings in his first talking film, and by the elaborate fluidity of the whole style—"a smooth and easy blending of sequences through dissolves, and music and song which moved with the images", as Lewis Jacobs describes it in *The Rise of the American Film*, adding: "This technically superb picture had all the qualities Sternberg was to over-emphasise in his later efforts".

For Sternberg was to travesty both himself and Dietrich. After responding so intensely to the Germany of 1929, he returned to America and composed films in an elegant vacuum: the sting went out of the characterisations of his star because they were all emptied of any social implications. We saw a puppet whose sins were romantic, upper class and superficial, a doll whose world weariness passed for wisdom. In *The Blue Angel* Sternberg created a Dietrich whose place in life was classic and tragic, implicated in the whole of society, an image of flesh and blood.

## Credits

*Producer:* Erich Pommer. *Director:* Josef von Sternberg. *Script:* Karl Zuckmayer, Karl Volkmoller and Robert Liebmann, from Heinrich Mann's novel "Professor Unrath" (1905). *Camera:* Gunther Rittau. *Design:* Otto Hunte. *Music:* Friedrich Hollander. *With:* Marlene Dietrich, Emil Jannings, Kurt Gerron, Rosa Valetti and Hans Albers.

## NEW BOOKS

FILM FORM, by Sergei Eisenstein. Translated by Jay Leyda. (Dobson, 18/6)

### Reviewed by Karel Reisz

"There's something about the movies that brings out these damn generalisations. You never think of doing that about a work of fiction. You know who your people are and you track them down specifically one by one". (This is Manley Halliday, the distinguished American writer in *The Disenchanted*, Budd Schulberg's latest novel, musing about his first attempt to write a film script. One sees his point. Looking back at most of the theoretical writing on the cinema which appeared in the 30's, one is left today with the inevitable question—*cui bono?* Theoretical expositions of the arts tend, in the main, to be more or less skilfully disguised apologies for the theoretician's favourite styles, and favourite styles change: the "damn generalisations" are apt to lose their point. If, among the welter of theoretical writing, Eisenstein's contributions retain their point, it is because they are in two respects unique. First, they came from the pen of a practising and experimenting film-maker who used his generalisations as a pointer to further experiment rather than as a summary of past achievements. Secondly, Eisenstein formulated his aesthetic system for the cinema not so much by reference to past films as by analogy with the other arts.

"I don't know how my readers feel about this, but for me personally it is always pleasing to recognise again and again the fact that our cinema is not altogether without parents and without pedigree, without a past, without the traditions and rich cultural heritage of the past epochs. It is only very thoughtless people and presumptuous people who can erect laws and an aesthetic for cinema, proceeding from premises of some incredible virgin-birth of this art!"

Rationalising from the analogies between the cinema and examples from the senior arts, Eisenstein builds up his somewhat precarious theoretical apparatus—precarious, because other examples could in many cases be legitimately cited to prove an opposite point. At best, this produces the flashes of illumination which one gets from all good critical writing. At other times, the analogies, in Eisenstein's own words, "take on the air of machinations and card tricks", and complicate relatively simple issues. At such times, Eisenstein's speculations degenerate into a fruitless intellectual exercise, a kind of snobbish attempt to buy respectability for the cinema by discovering academic roots. Since his writing alternates between these two levels, it is difficult to read—

at one moment highly rewarding, at the next stodgy and almost incomprehensible.

Any review of the present collection of essays should, I think, start with the admission that for the English reader a great deal of its material is obscure. Many of the essays appear to have been written in the course of some local controversy, and answer questions one does not realise have been raised. A greater difficulty arises from the fact that Eisenstein was—and knew he was—an atrocious writer: he rambles off the point, constantly defines new terms, produces tiresome catalogues, jumps from the trivial to the significant without change of emphasis. Just as one is getting used to the line of his argument, he may suddenly switch to a new line of attack or pause to give a little lecture on the fourth dimension and the theory of relativity (ending with the inane aside: "And we'll soon be posing the question of a fifth dimension"). As a result, some of the articles lose their sense of direction and no central argument emerges: the wheat gets lost among the (often extremely interesting) chaff. How much of this is the translator's fault I am unable to judge, though, as they stand, many of Mr. Leyda's sentences surrender their meaning only after a great deal of research on the reader's part—and then, one often feels, unwillingly.

Many of the essays in *Film Form* are of primarily biographical interest: *Through Theatre to Cinema* describes Eisenstein's apprenticeship; *Film Language* contains a detailed analysis of the structure of *Potemkin*; *The Unexpected* traces the influence of the Kabuki theatre on Eisenstein's work; *A Course in Treatment* describes his work on the adaptation of Dreiser's *An American Tragedy*.

The longest essay, *Dickens, Griffith and the Film Today*, is the most consistently rewarding of Eisenstein's writing. Starting from biographical evidence, he shows how the discovery of most of Griffith's editing devices can be directly traced back to literary equivalents in the novels of Dickens. Ingeniously, he finds literary analogies for close shot, flash back, parallel editing, even the dissolve. When, however, in *Intolerance*, Griffith tried to go further—to express an intellectual theme by means of the technical devices he had developed from Dickens—his inspiration fails him. Eisenstein analyses this failure of *Intolerance* by showing that the four stories illustrate rather than directly express the film's theme:

The reason for this failure was of quite another nature; particularly in Griffith's misunderstanding, that the region of metaphorical and imagist writing appears in the sphere of *montage juxtaposition*, not of *representational montage pieces*.

Out of this came his unsuccessful use of the repeated refrain



shot: Lillian Gish rocking a cradle. Griffith had been inspired to translate these lines of Walt Whitman,

*endlessly rocks the cradle, Uniter of Here and Hereafter not in structure, not in the harmonic recurrence of montage expressiveness, but in an isolated picture, with the result that the cradle could not possibly be abstracted into an image of eternally reborn epochs and remained inevitably simply a lifelike cradle, calling forth derision, surprise and vexation in the spectator".*

And later:

"It is not that representation cannot be raised with correct presentation and treatment to the structure of metaphor, simile, image. Nor is it that Griffith here altered his method or professional craftsmanship. But that he made no genuinely thoughtful abstraction of phenomena—at an extraction of generalised conclusions on historical phenomena from a wide variety of historical data; that is the core of the fault".

(This quotation, incidentally, illustrates the difficulty of the whole book. Ideas can only be reached by wading through this morass of forbidding verbiage).

Eisenstein explains that it was precisely this missing element in Griffith's work—the ability to "extract generalised conclusions from historical data"—that the young Soviet directors needed for their propagandist purposes. And he goes on to elaborate his theory of intellectual cinema, which he stated in greater detail in *The Film Sense*.

This desire to make the film medium break the confines of narrative—to make the story serve merely as a structure to support a series of intellectual cadenzas—crops up in Eisenstein's sound films in a slightly different guise. In his projected adaptation of Dreiser's novel *An American Tragedy* (described in *A Course in Treatment*) Eisenstein became preoccupied with the problem of what he calls the "inner monologue". When, in the novel, the hero, Clyde Griffiths, is on the point of murdering his mistress, Dreiser allots him a longish chapter of monologue in which Clyde weighs up the chances of detection and lets his conscience wrestle with his social ambition. Eisenstein felt that it was not possible in a work of fiction to convey a sequence of inner thoughts of this kind satisfactorily—unless it "breaks through the limits of its orthodox enclosure". "Literature," he continues, "is limited either to the primitive rhetoric used by Dreiser to describe Clyde's inner murmurings or to the worse pseudo-classic tirades of O'Neill's heroes in *Strange Interlude*..." Eisenstein believed, however, that the cinema could overcome this difficulty and describes the method he devised in the case of Clyde's monologue.

"What wonderful sketches those lists were!

Like thought, they would sometimes proceed with visual images. With sound. Synchronized or non-synchronized. Then as sounds. Formless. Or with sound images: with objectively representational sounds...

Then suddenly, definite intellectually formulated words as "intellectual" and dispassionate as pronounced words. With a black screen, a rushing imageless visuality.

Then in passionate disconnected speech. Nothing but nouns. Or nothing but verbs. Then interjections...

Then racing visual images over complete silence.

Then linked with polyphonic sounds. Then polyphonic images.

Then both at once...

Eisenstein saw in this method a new "syntax of inner speech", and confidently predicated that, if realised, it would constitute a "180° advance in sound film culture". Hmmm...

Eisenstein's life work was devoted to the discovery of a kind of super-realism in which either the expression of an intellectual theme or of inner personal conflicts could be extended beyond the confines of conventional film narrative. It was his misfortune that both Hollywood and the socialist realists of his own country found his projects impracticable, and forced him to spend ten years in inactivity when he was at the height of his powers. But though these circumstances undoubtedly meant a great loss to the cinema, they must not encourage one to overstate his case. It is not really surprising that B. P. Schulberg turned down the treatment for *An American Tragedy*: indeed, those parts of it printed in *The Film Sense* make one wonder whether the "inner monologues" might not have proved as unmanageable as Eisenstein claims they are in works of fiction.

"To challenge laziness and naturalism", writes Mr. Leyda in his introduction, "puts the challenger at a disadvantage; it attaches 'anti-natural' labels to the challenger's principles and practice, and forces him to prove, in works, that they can be affective beyond those works whose 'simplicity' is essentially negative". This, though true, presupposes that "naturalism" is necessarily negative. Clearly, in the hands of a Donskoi, a Ford

or a Carné, it is nothing of the sort. These directors accept broadly the narrative methods of the cinema initiated by Griffith, and the disciplines that go with them. Eisenstein's aim was to rid himself of these disciplines, to do for the story-film what James Joyce—the comparison is his own—did for the novel. How important one considers his theoretical writings depends, therefore, to a large extent, on what one thinks of his films. For his aesthetic system, like that of any other artist, remains a rationalisation of his personal style.

A SEAT AT THE CINEMA, by Roger Manvell.

(Evans, 12s.6d.)

DR. MANVELL'S new book divides itself into two parts: "The Cinema and You", a survey of the general influence of the medium, of the problems of an "art-industry", of censorship, the position of the film critic, and so on; and "The Cinema and the Artist", an exposition of the principles of film appreciation, also taking in an account of the making of a film from conception to final editing. There are excerpts from the scripts of *The Third Man* and *Brief Encounter* to illuminate a chapter on "The Film and Character". "I have tried", Dr. Manvell writes in conclusion, "to describe the background to film making in a manner which explains the problems the artist has to face, without trying to excuse his failure to overcome them. It has shown the film as an art-industry, typical of the twentieth century in the confusion of its values as it hurries on in the competitive chase..." The scope, in fact, is similar to that of the same author's admirable Pelican volume, *Film*, though the presentation is both less vivid and specific. It is a pity that the illustrations are, as a whole, unilluminating.

*A Seat at the Cinema* is a difficult kind of book to write really successfully. The ground has by now been very adequately covered in general terms—and, as the writer himself remarks, "... there is no easy answer, unless film making can be simplified once again and be made as cheap to promote as the less ambitious forms of professional play production". The problem of the limitations of an "art-industry" cannot, in fact, admit a general solution beyond this point.

CAME THE DAWN, Memories of a Film Pioneer, by Cecil M. Hepworth. (Phoenix House, 16s.)

DISCURSIVE, anecdotal, Mr. Hepworth's book is more a series of random reminiscences than a considered autobiography: the style effaces the personality and highlights the material. The latter, of course, is fascinating, but one could wish to know more about the indefatigable pioneer himself whose *Rescued by Rover* (1905) was the biggest popular and financial success of its time and had to be remade "a second time and then even a third, because we wore out the negatives in the making of the four hundred prints to satisfy the demand". The author adds, with characteristic charm: "It was my biggest thing ever, since *The Funeral of Queen Victoria*".

Mr. Hepworth entered films at the "fairground" period, and quickly became a leading personality: he founded his own company as early as 1904 at Walton-on-Thames studios—and by 1919 the modest Hepworth Manufacturing Co. had become Hepworth Picture Plays Ltd. (with a capital of £100,000), in partnership with Violet Hopson, who had acted in films since the early days. Its first productions were *The City of Beautiful Nonsense* (with Henry Edwards) and *The Amazing Quest of Mr. Ernest Bliss*. By this time, Mr. Hepworth himself was devoting his talents to production more frequently than to direction, but in 1924 he personally made a long and ambitious new version of an earlier success, *Comin' Thro' The Rye*, with the unforgettable Alma Taylor. He regards this as his "best and most important film", but it proved, alas, his own swan song and the last production of Hepworth Picture Plays. A few weeks later the receivers were in to dispose of the assets of the disintegrated company.

Not even *Comin' Thro' the Rye* shows the touch of a serious artist, or a man with an original style, but art was not Cecil Hepworth's province: a man whose charm, honesty and conscientiousness won him great personal loyalty in his twenty years of pioneer work, he reinvigorated the production of entertainment pictures and raised them to a new level of enterprise and craftsmanship without ostentation or extravagance. He looks back—from his work at National Screen Service, where he has been for many years now—on the final collapse of his company without bitterness. Today the twinges of doubt that assail him are: "Did I devote too much thought to my yachting and allow my eyes to stray from the danger threatening on land? ... Ought I, much earlier, to have disbanded the stock-company I was so proud of, and laid off the staff who had always been so loyal to me, and just sat down and waited for better times? I don't know..."



CAHIERS DU CINEMA. Editors: Lo Duca and Jacques Doniol-Valcroze. (Monthly, 150 frs. 146 Champs Elysées, Paris 8. London Agents: Anglo-French Literary Services, 72 Charlotte Street, W.1.)

L'AGE DU CINEMA. Editors: Adonis Kyrou, Robert Benayoun. (Monthly, 100 frs. 25 Avenue Reille, Paris 14.)

An important new French film periodical is *Cahiers du Cinéma*, which continues the tradition of *La Revue du Cinéma* and reunites many of its distinguished contributors—André Bazin, Lo Duca, Pierre Kast, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze and others. The June issue contains a long study of Robert Bresson by Bazin, probably the most comprehensive that has appeared on this remarkable director. It has many apt points to make, and once or twice lapses into pedantry—"Ought one say that *Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne* is a silent film with talking subtitles?" Of the film reviews, most interesting are Doniol-Valcroze on Rouquier's new documentary, *Le Sel de la Terre*, and Jean Quéval on Becker's *Edouard et Caroline*. Lavishly and attractively produced, well illustrated, *Cahiers du Cinéma* has in three issues asserted itself as the most varied and readable of French film periodicals.

The editorial of the first number of the screen-shaped *L'Age du Cinéma* began: "S'il a passé le stade de l'adolescence, le Cinéma n'a pas encore atteint son âge de raison". The same is generally true of the contents of each issue, which has an eruptive just-post-adolescent liveliness—as when it declares Patricia Neal "d'une exceptionnelle stature dramatique".

## THE SOUND TRACK

THE COLUMBIA ISSUE of a Suite: *Louisiana Story* (Virgil Thompson) is something of a triumph for that small band of enthusiasts who take their film music seriously. The American long-playing disc was issued shortly after the appearance of the film but an issue in this country was not at first considered. Then the B.B.C. put on various quotations from the sound-track, the American Embassy imported the long-playing record which enjoyed a steady circulation, while one of the tunes was introduced at the Bangor Summer School last year and was much played. The suite starts with calm yet highly-coloured prelude which occupies most of Reel One; Thompson calls it "Pastorale: The Bayou and the Marsh Buggy". The woodwind "choral" for the arrival of the derrick shows the composer at his "folksey" best; it is without question one of the loveliest sounds ever made to accompany a film. Thompson continues to observe the musical forms with the passacaglia for "The Robbing of the Alligator's Nest", and the recording ends with a clearly-expounded fugue for the boy's fight with the alligator. To stress the success of this music would be superfluous; it is only necessary to quote the numbers, namely, Colombia LX 8802-8803.

JOHN HUNTLEY.

Correspondence—continued from page 2

## THE CINEMA 1951

*The Editor*, SIGHT AND SOUND,

Sir,—We wish to correct a misunderstanding which has arisen out of the wording of a sentence included in the Introductory article to *The Cinema 1951*. The sentence is:

"Already the film has been used as a bargaining weapon in the negotiation of trade agreements with the United States and the application of Marshall Aid, to the extent that, for instance, the French industry is hamstrung, Swedish production is on the point of ceasing, and British producers are facing an acute financial crisis".

It has been said that this statement (which should, of course, be read in its context) is derogatory to both the American government and the American film industry. We wish to correct this impression. There is no criticism, either direct or indirect, of the American government or the American film industry as such. The statement is that the film has been made an important factor in the negotiation of general trade agreements between America and other countries. Our criticism is a general one. The article urges that the film, which is so highly specialised an industry vitally affecting national and international opinion, should be kept as free as possible from the bargaining involved in general trade negotiations between Governments.

We do not, as Editors, want the statement in *The Cinema 1951* to imply, either directly or indirectly, more than just this, and we regret any other implications which may have been derived from this statement.

Yours faithfully,

ROGER MANVELL  
R. K. NEILSON BAXTER,  
*Editors.*

54, Lancaster Gate, W.1.

## "FILMS IN 1951"

We regret that in the reference section to British production and distribution companies in the British Film Institute's festival publication, "Film's in 1951," there were two important omissions. In the list of distributors, MONTANA FILM CORP., 21 Wigmore St., W.1., who specialise in continental films, should have been included; and WALLACE PRODUCTIONS LTD., Wallace Centre, 8 Berwick St., W.1., noted for documentary, industrial and advertising film production, were omitted from the Short Films section.

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## SOVIET CINEMA

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND*

Sir,—May I record a few comments on H. H. Wollenberg's article "Soviet Cinema's Change of Heart" in the June issue of *SIGHT AND SOUND*?

Never has "artistic expression ceased to be an end in itself" in the Soviet cinema, because it never was that. Even those "formalistic experiments" by Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Kuleshov and others, which were condemned in the early 30's—when socialist realism was being formulated in the early talkies—were made in films propagating revolutionary ideals. Propagandist motives and the fight against art for art's sake are exactly as old as the Soviet cinema itself. But whereas the pioneers of the silent film and the outstanding talents of the talkies were genuine artistic innovators, the film makers of the 1940's clung to formulas and (except in the use of colour) contributed little to the development of the medium.

Conferences such as the one held at the end of last year have always been regular events. Policy, Dr. Wollenberg writes, "is determined not by creative film makers but by a new generation of Soviet officials". It may be relevant to add here that at the Cannes festival, answering a question on the drawing up of a plan of a film, Pudovkin said that directors and writers put up their own ideas to fit in with the plan. Probably officials and film makers work out the plan *together*, as they have always done. Its aims, at all events, as specified in the quotations from Deputy Minister Shitkin, are familiar enough—except for the inclusion of anti-Western propaganda, a development dating from about 1947-48.

Finally, the essay by V. Pudovkin and E. Smirnova can hardly be, as Dr. Wollenberg suggests, a confession, a self-accusation, written to please those who determine the policy of today. *All* the principles in it are *reiterations* of those that have made up Soviet film criticism and theory since the early 1930's. Pudovkin subscribed to them long ago. There is not a single new idea. *And that is the point*. Unlike Dr. Wollenberg, I see nothing sinister in a struggle against the old "formalism" etc., and for "a genuinely dramatic ideal art". If only *some* struggle could be detected in the current films, it would be all right. The trouble with the Soviet cinema today is that it is not, apparently, moving forward.

Also, I think it wrong to attribute to principles that are admirable in themselves, the misuse of them in recent films. I refer, for instance, to the admirable idea in Soviet films of encouraging genuinely national style. I even doubt whether the absurd chauvinistic habit of attributing various scientific discoveries to Russians in recent films is a distortion of that principle. More likely it is just a crude manifestation of hero worship.

Nothing in Dr. Wollenberg's article reveals any change of heart in the Soviet cinema. I suspect that it would be an over-simplification to attribute the halt in progress to the officials alone—who, after all, have always had their say; the masters, middle-aged men now, may be past their prime: and the new generation? We saw something of them in *Young Guard*. If there are any personalities among them of the dynamic calibre of the 1920's pioneers, perhaps they will bring about a real change of heart.

Yours faithfully,  
CATHERINE DE LA ROCHE.

8 Rayners Road, S.W.15.

## UNFAIR TO EISENSTEIN?

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND*

Sir,—Mr. Reisz writes: "I confess that I find Mr. McLeod's arguments extremely difficult to follow".

Just how far did Mr. Reisz overcome this difficulty? If, indeed, he did not understand the points made, then he would have better left his answer unwritten. I think it wrong, however, to dismiss what seem to me very relevant criticisms, with such contempt.

What is the cause of Eisenstein's "lack of lasting influence on practical film-making" that Mr. Reisz refers to? The "Answer" is obviously the Marxist one: that it is "the radical causes in the economic system and in the character of the development of all capitalist countries which constantly give rise to these departures".

To put it more brutally: the culture of the "contemporary directors", as well as that of the comic-strip abortions of Shakespeare; of "Atom-man v. Super-man"; of the sex-sodden sadistic plays and novels, is linked inseparably with Capitalism in decay.

To show that Eisenstein does have a lasting influence on other aspects of practical film-making, Mr. McLeod quotes *Day of Wrath*

and *Indonesia Calling*. This can be supplemented with many more—for instance the post-war American documentary *Strange Victory*. Remember the remarkable shots of the babies, first gurgling happily, then suddenly, savagely screaming as the commentator initiates them in the facts of American life; or the quick merciless cuts from Hitler Fascism to the suggestion of its American post-war counterpart.

Eisenstein's influence is there all right, if you bother to look for it.

Yours faithfully,  
M. JACOBSEN.

Fairholt Road, London, N.16.

## NEGLECTED FILMS

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND*

Sir,—The description of the near boycott of *Intruder in the Dust* by cinemas in the Manchester area, given by reader S. Wrigley in the May issue, is heartbreaking, and I have no doubt the film was given a similar reception in quite a few other parts of the country.

I can report one brighter aspect of the film's career, however, to show that provincial cinemas were not all so timid.

*Intruder* was given fully average screenings in the Edinburgh area. It was shown for a week at the city's largest cinema, as the main feature, and the evening I saw it there were decent queues. Later, it visited all the main suburbs, mostly double billed with *Shadow on the Wall*, and about equally shared the first feature position with that film. A fair number of country towns in the south of Scotland have also seen it, as the solo feature.

I do not think Edinburgh cinemagoers are different from those in other districts: surely the exhibitors are THE main obstacle in the drive for more intelligent films, and not the audiences?

To end cheerfully, I may add that those other neglected films of quality, the circuit-boycotted *The Search*, *The Men*, and the revival of *City Lights*, also appeared at the Scottish capital's largest cinema.

Yours faithfully,  
W. J. SCOTT.

2 Meadow Park, Haddington, East Lothian.

## THE TELEKINEMA

*The Editor, SIGHT AND SOUND*

Sir,—It is to be deprecated that the management of the Telekinema at the South Bank Exhibition have decided to restrict their programmes to the screening of large scale television and stereoptic films.

It is understood that the original intention was to confine these interesting novelties to the first half of each session and completing each programme with one or other of a series of British documentary films which have been specially commissioned for the Festival of Britain.

No doubt the desire to cater for the natural popular interest in the novel media referred to, is responsible for this decision. A greater number of people can have the opportunity to view each day if the sessions are curtailed in this fashion.

Nevertheless it is to be deplored that the general public, and in particular foreign visitors to the Festival, will not have the opportunity of seeing examples of outstanding British short film production, which, quite apart from their technical merits, present so adequately the British way of life.

This is even more unfortunate in the light of the news that the projected plans for a Festival of British Films to be held shortly in London have fallen through because of difficulties connected with the payment of entertainment duty.

Yours faithfully,  
CLIVE A. FREEDMAN.

20 Abbey Road, N.W.8.

*We agree with Mr. Freedman that it is unfortunate that the documentary films have had to be omitted from the regular Telekinema programme. The decision was necessary, however, because of the enormous demand for tickets. By the end of May about 90,000 people had seen the programme. To keep queues within manageable proportions, it was necessary to increase the number of daily shows to nine, at the cost of the documentaries. On Tuesdays, when the South Bank Exhibition is less crowded, documentaries continue to be shown as was originally intended.*



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